IN SEARCH OF TIME

WHAT THE SMART INVEST IN, THAT THE AVERAGE DO NOT

A LIFEHACK E-BOOK

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Buy Time or Buy Stuff?

Think of the last time you bought something you really wanted. How did you feel afterwards? It felt good.

Now, is there something else you really want? Maybe a new laptop, smartphone, or some nice clothes. Buying that thing, whatever it is, will bring you happiness. When you finally have it, you will be excited to try it out.
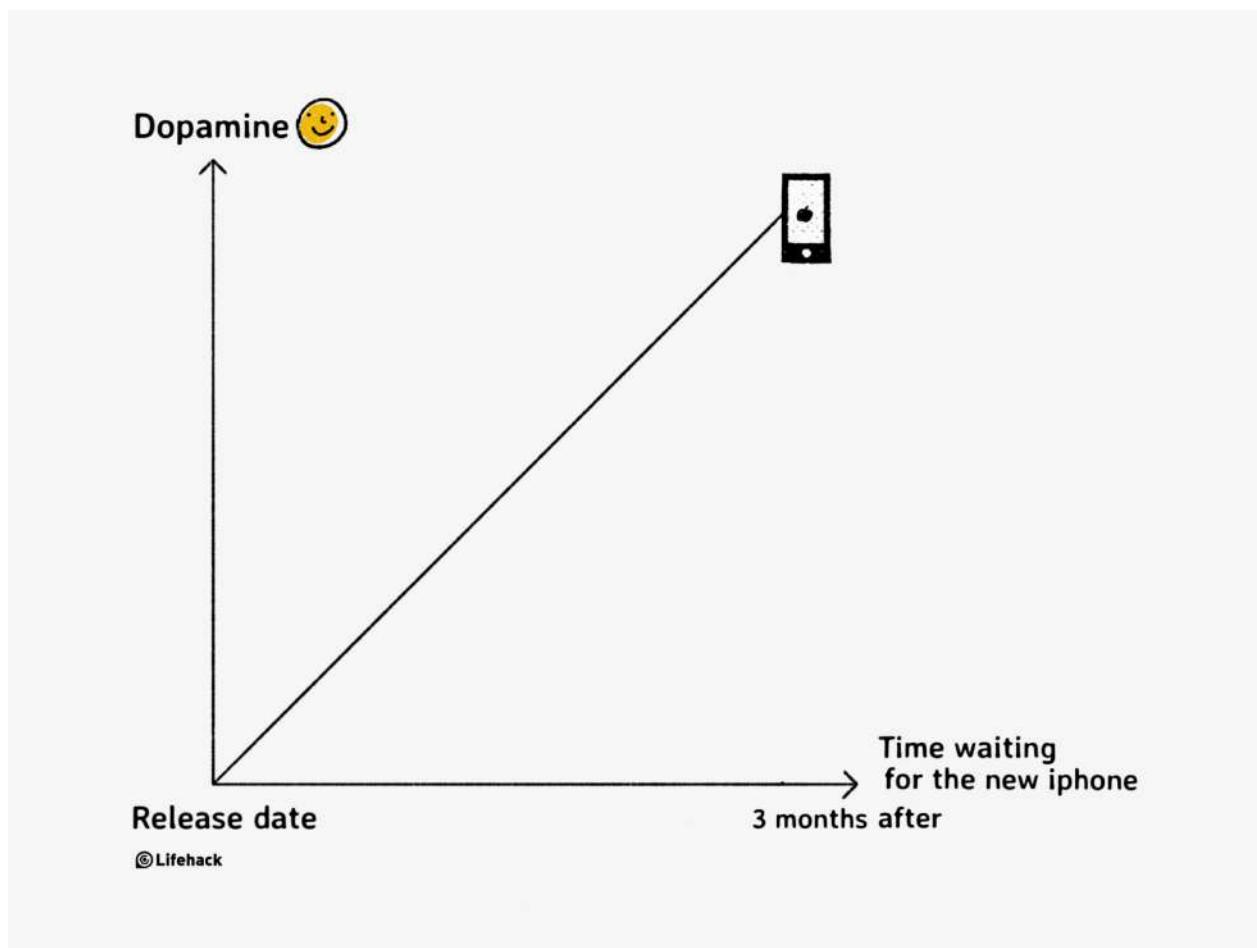
As cliche as it says "money can't buy you happiness", we feel happy when we buy the things

we want.

Sorry, This Happiness Is Fake
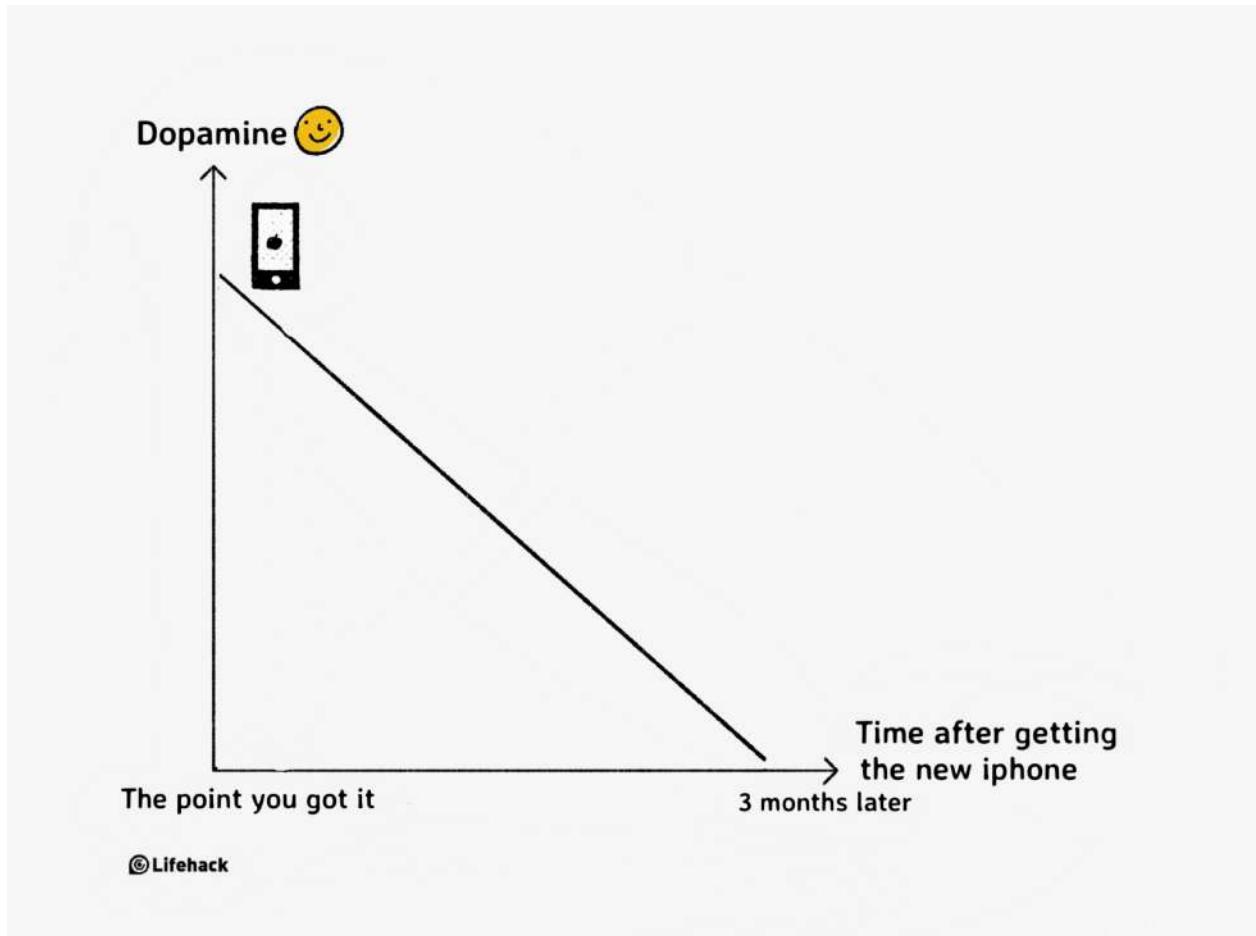
Human beings are hardwired to seek instant gratification. You've probably heard the phrase instant gratification hundreds of times. To get that thing we want, the moment we want it. This desire for instant gratification came to us as a survival mechanism. I'm not going to talk about instant gratification in details here, if you want to find out more about it, take a look at 5 Ways to Get Over Approval Addiction and Instant Gratification.

While instant gratification is in human's nature, we live in a society driven by delayed gratification. Delayed gratification is the desire for something but the inability to get it when you want. In our society, you have to wait for your pay day, your meal at a restaurant, your coffee at Starbucks. When the thing you want finally arrives, you get excited.

Your excitement for this thing, the delayed gratification often elicits stronger emotional responses in you than when you get it. This feeling comes from dopamine a chemical that influences the pleasure centers in our brains.((Psychology Today: Shopping, Dopamine, and Anticipation)) When you become excited for something, you are actually enjoying a release of dopamine into our system. The thing you are actually excited for is almost secondary to it.

Think about it, how did you feel a couple hours after buying something you waited a long time for? It was probably not nearly as good as when you first got it, or when you're waiting to get it. It's natural, it's a part of human nature.

In this way the happiness you feel isn't true happiness. In fact, biologically speaking, you're just enjoying a blast of dopamine. When this blast of dopamine is gone, you want something new again, which is secretly, more dopamine. This is what that old saying "money can't buy you happiness" really means.

There is, however, a way in which money *can* buy you happiness. It's just not in a way you think.
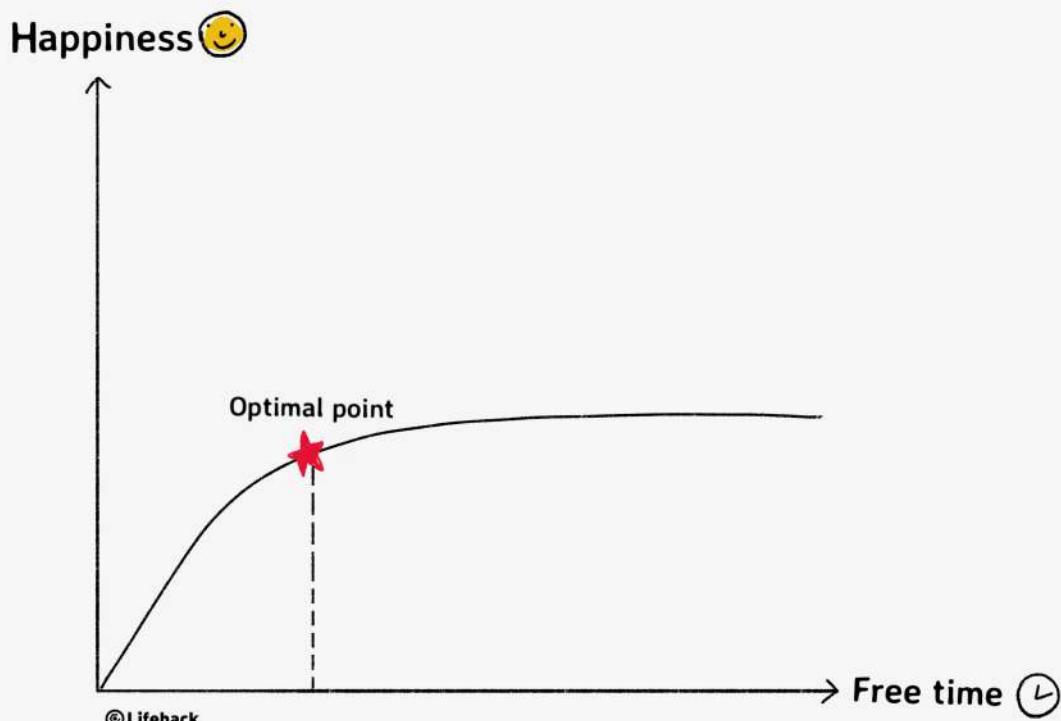
If You Want Happiness, Buy Time

Recently Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA conducted a study where two groups of people were given $40 each.((PNAS: Buying time promotes happiness)) One group was told to spend it in buying a possession, an object, something they wanted. The other group was told to spend it in ways that would enable them to have more free time, for example, having food delivered to save them from cooking, or hiring a cleaner, instead of cleaning their house themselves. When each participant in the study

were to measure their happiness to a 10 point scale, those who spent their money on more free time were almost always one whole point ahead of those who spent their money on stuff.

In a sense, they were happier because they brought themselves out of doing something they didn't want to do. Just buying more stuff, in the long run didn't have much of an affect on their happiness, when those who spent money on time found an increase in life satisfaction.

It was the free time that made people happy.

It was the quality time that contributed more to their happiness, the money was just a tool they used to get more time. But the money ultimately is unnecessary. All that is required is a re-adjustment of how you measure time.

Everyone has 24 hours a day. The life expectancy for females is 81.2 years; for males, it's 76.4 years. Most people have more or less the same time of living. To make every hour, or minute count is the way to create your own happy time. If you are always feeling busy and don't think you have enough quality time for yourself, you need to make a change to turn things around.

Make Time or Make Money?

Time is finite. Each of us on this planet are here only temporarily. It's important to use time wisely, yet it is easy to get caught up spending your time doing things that don't really matter. Most people act in ways that are only sustainable if we had an infinite amount of time. But we don't.

Imagine you were able to save $10 per day, and let it build. After a year you will have accumulated $3,650. Equally, if you were able to save 10 minutes of a day to be reused later, by the end of the year, you would have saved 60 hours.

What would you choose?

Most would go with the money. It's understandable. Humans like tangible rewards.

However, money by its nature is salvageable. If you lose money, you may have the opportunity to make it back again. But time is different. Once an hour passes, you lose that hour forever. What many people often forget is that those accumulated 60 hours can become something far more valuable than $3,650. To truly value our time, we must convert it into something tangible in our minds.
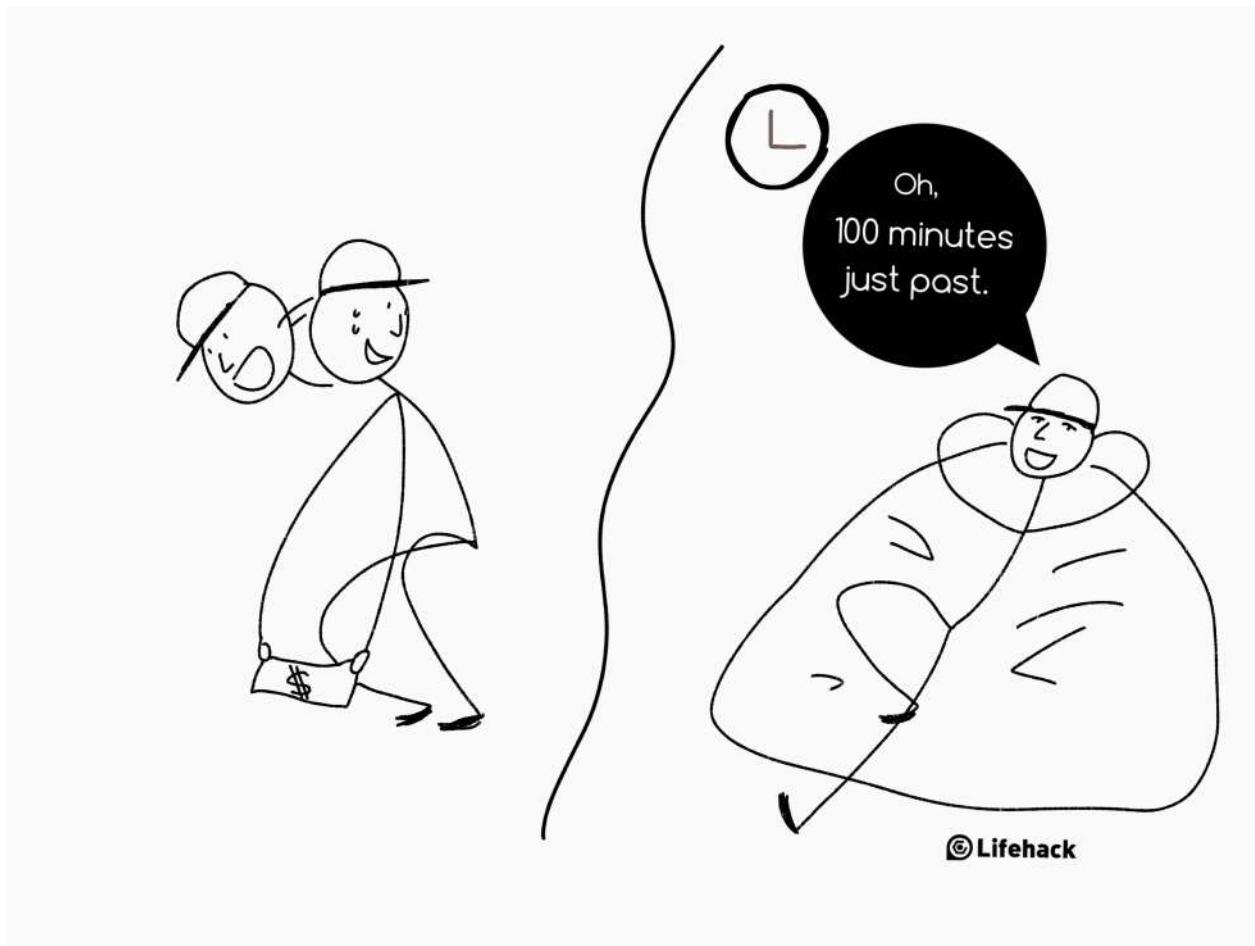
Money Is Tangible but Time Is Not?

Our lives are a series of experiences. Everything we pursue is, at the end of the day, aimed at creating positive meaning out of these experiences. Everyone wants to have more enjoyable experiences than unenjoyable ones, and want the same for those they care about.

But what is the currency that you must trade to have these experiences?

That currency is **time**. Everything is just a means to this end. Without time to spend, everything else is meaningless. You can be a billionaire, but if you had only 1 hour to experience its value, those billions are suddenly not worth so much.

We are generally much more conscious of how we gain and lose money. For example, if you dropped $100 on the floor, I'm pretty sure you would immediately turn around and pick it up. On the other hand, if you wasted 100 minutes doing nothing, it might barely register.

Although we know that time is limited, we often think and act as if it is not. It's obvious that treating your finances in this way, like having a $100 budget but spending as if it was $10,000, would soon get you bankrupt. Treating time like this is far more damaging.
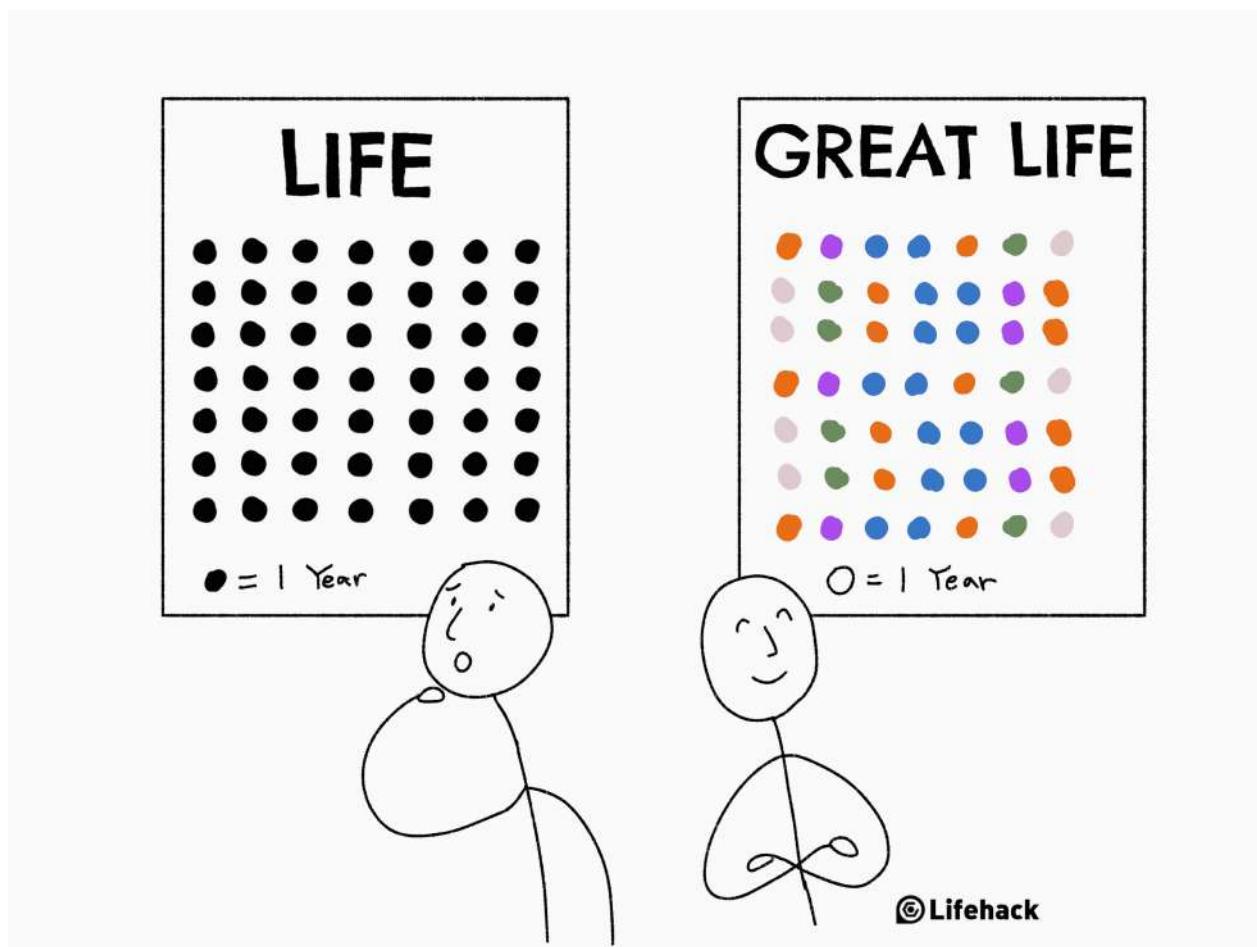
> "Life is what happens to you while you are busy making other plans" - John Lennon

The reason that money seems so tangible is because dollar figures are attached to everything around us. It helps us to assign relative value between things. But it can be the same for time.

The Proper Way to Measure Time

A day will always be 24 hours. There will always be 60 minutes in an hour, and there will always be 60 seconds to a minute. Some lives are longer, some are shorter, but let's assume you're lucky and get around 70-80 years. How many of these years are the prime of your youth, or in good health? How many of these years are just short windows in time that you have with your loved ones?

Instead of just considering time as a quantity spent in minutes or hours, **how we spend** it is more important. **Your quality of life** is basically defined by the **quality of your time.** And you should also look at it from more than one dimension.

For example, ask yourself these questions.

- How many hours in a day do you spend being angry, anxious, dissatisfied, or unhappy?
- How much time do you spend actually connecting with a loved one as opposed to just being in the same room as them?
- How much time do you plan for improving yourself each day, or each week?
- How many hours of your life do you spend doing things you don't enjoy for reasons that you don't really understand?
- We sleep on average 6-8 hours a night, but how many hours are quality rest? How many, then.. are just wasted lying in bed?

If these are typical questions that you regularly take actions to address, then you're well on your way to being in charge of the quality of your life. If you don't, then it's a great time to get started.

I'm not suggesting to quit your job, and spend everyday however you like. That is unreasonable and unrealistic. However, there are countless choices that you make everyday about how you think about things and what you decide to focus on. You're constantly making these choices whether you're aware of them or not. If you take charge by being consciously

aware of these choices, you can gain countless hours, days, and even years of meaningful time spent. Everyone has the same 24 hours a day, but you can take control over more of this time than you think.

The first step is to make **quality time** a true value in your life, and not just a cliche.

> Your quality of life is basically defined by the quality of your time.

What if you could take small actions during the day that vastly improved the quality of your sleep? Or boost your productivity and energy through the day by investing in a 20 minute nap. How about spending time connecting more deeply with friends and loved ones in the short time you have with them? These are only the tip of the iceberg in an encyclopaedia of ways to increase the quality of your time, which is one of our core values at Lifehack.

Some of the greatest regrets we have in life are those valuable moments lost because of how we chose to spend our time. Imagine the millions we would pay to be able to go back in time to respend those moments, or to make different choices. So make the choice to truly value your time. While you're still alive and breathing, it's never too late!

Section I: Smartcut & Time

For individuals, productivity is about how well you utilize time and resources to perform the best. For teams and organization, it's about creating and improving resources such as raw materials, labor force, skills, capital and managerial capabilities to achieve greater goals. This section will provide you with all the necessary tricks to get more things done faster and better.

The Hidden Potential of a Morning Routine

Having a solid morning routine is one of the best ways to increase your productivity and improve your overall well-being.

My morning routine was in need of a serious overhaul. I went through a phase where I rolled over and checked my phone before I got out of bed. I just had to know what I had missed while I slept. You may be able to relate. Many of us start our days by checking our emails and social media, but this might not be the best thing for us.((Fortune: Why You Should Never Start Your Day Reading Emails))

Starting our morning off incorrectly can drain our productivity. The typical work day lasts for eight hours, but we all know that our energy fluctuates during the day. ((The Path: How your energy levels fluctuate throughout the day)) You may start your day feeling perky, but as the day wears on, you might find yourself in need of a nap. You have to make the most of periods of high energy.

Learn to work when your mind is at its sharpest

Benjamin Hardy's "This Morning Routine will Save You 20+ Hours Per Week" offers helpful insights about the best ways to make the most of our time. The basic premise is that you are at your sharpest and most energetic first thing in the morning. Many people do not make full use of this productivity window.

How much work you did actually means nothing. What you did is key

It can be tempting to start your day by ticking a number of items of minor importance or your checklist. The problem is that by the time you dig yourself out from under a mountain of small tasks, you'll probably be tired. This makes it so much harder to do the bigger and more important things on your list.

For example, checking 100 emails might feel like you are being productive, but they're just keeping you busy. Try doing one high-value action item first thing in the morning, and save those emails for later.

Plan your first three hours carefully because you are at your productivity peak

Provided that we've had enough sleep, our minds are at their freshest within the first three hours of waking. When you take full advantage of this productivity window, you'll be able to do better quality work in less time.

If you save your most important work for the afternoon, you put yourself at a disadvantage. By then, you are already tired, and it will take more effort for you to get the same results that you could easily get in the morning.

It helps to start out by plotting out the tasks that you have to do and prioritizing your schedule. David Allen's *Getting Things Done* method is one of the best productivity models for helping you prioritize and organize.((Samuel Thomas Davies: *Getting Things Done by David Allen*))

Allen's method is simple. Write down the items that need your attention, decide which pieces you need to work on yourself, which ones can be delegated, and which ones are not actionable. After you've determined what you need to do, break big projects into smaller steps, set deadlines to prioritize action items, and execute.

At Lifehack, we love using the *Getting Things Done* method. You can read more about how we've implemented it from Brian Lee((Lifehack.org: Think Less and Get More Done By Using The "Getting Things Done" Model)) and CM Smith. ((Lifehack.org: Why Getting Things Done is the Best Productivity System))

Never underestimate the power of your rest and recovery, they determine large part of your productivity tomorrow

So many of us have been brought up to believe that tireless work and constant availability are the hallmarks of a great employee. In fact, failing to unplug from work can be detrimental to your health, happiness, and work.

Hardy states:

> *"When you're at work, be fully absorbed. When it's time to call it a day, completely detach yourself from work and become absorbed in the other areas of your life."*

When you are working, engage completely in whatever you are doing. When it's time to come home, refrain from checking your email or taking late calls. You need the time to unwind so that you don't burn out.

When you come back to work after keeping your free time sacred, you'll be better equipped to tackle challenges. You won't dread your job, you'll be less likely to procrastinate, and you'll be more effective.

It's time to adopt a new morning routine

If you're squandering your most productive times by playing with your phone like I was, it's time for a morning routine overhaul. Before I read "This Morning Routine will Save You 20+ Hours Per Week" I didn't realize how much time I was wasting.

Instead of spending my first three hours scrolling through my Facebook and clearing my inbox, I start my day with mindfulness. I have a healthy breakfast, take my dog for a 20-minute walk, where I think about and prioritize my schedule, and then I get to work right away.

I've noticed that I can work for a solid three to five hours by putting aside menial task until later in the day. When I do stop to take a break, I disconnect completely for a few minutes. Even if my day stopped here, I can already say that I accomplished a great deal.

I worry about my emails and social media after I've worked solidly on a high-priority project for at least three hours. Since those tasks don't require too much creativity or deep-thinking, I can do them when my energy is lower without making any sacrifices.

Changing my routine has made it easier to get more done

Rethinking my morning routine has enabled me to get more out of short periods of intense focus than I used to get out of working a full eight hours. Since I end my work days feeling like I have accomplished a lot, I don't feel any guilt over taking the time to recover when I go home. I commit to rest and relaxation with the same zeal that I pursue my priorities at work.

Hardy's method has restored balance to my schedule. I feel a greater sense of satisfaction from the work that I do, and I'm present in every situation in a way that I simply wasn't before.

The Secret Place Where All Great Ideas Are Born

Where do great ideas come from? The cliched view is that they come fully formed in a flash of inspiration. You've probably seen this in films or on TV, a character might be working over night trying to come up with a big idea, and suddenly their idea hits them.

However, the reality is actually far more complicated. The truly great ideas, are the product of processes. They are the product of what a person sees and gets in touch with every day that combine to influence a thought. A random thought turns into an idea, then the idea is worked on.

Consider twitter, twitter was originally not conceived as as a social network, but instead as an alternative to SMS messaging. The original 140 wasn't a creative gimmick, but was instead reflected the technological limitations of the mobile phone format (at the time). ((Lifewire: The Real History of Twitter, In Brief))

Uber came from a conversation between friends where they were complaining about how hard it was to find a decent taxi.((Gulf Elite: Startup From The Bottom: Here Is How Uber Started Out))

The idea for Airbnb came when the founders were struggling to pay rent, and needed a way to earn some extra money. Most of the hotel rooms in the city were booked up thanks to a local conference, so they thought that they could exploit this by providing extra space in their apartment for overnight guests.((Get Paid for Your Pad: The Airbnb Founder Story: From Selling Cereals To A $25B Company))
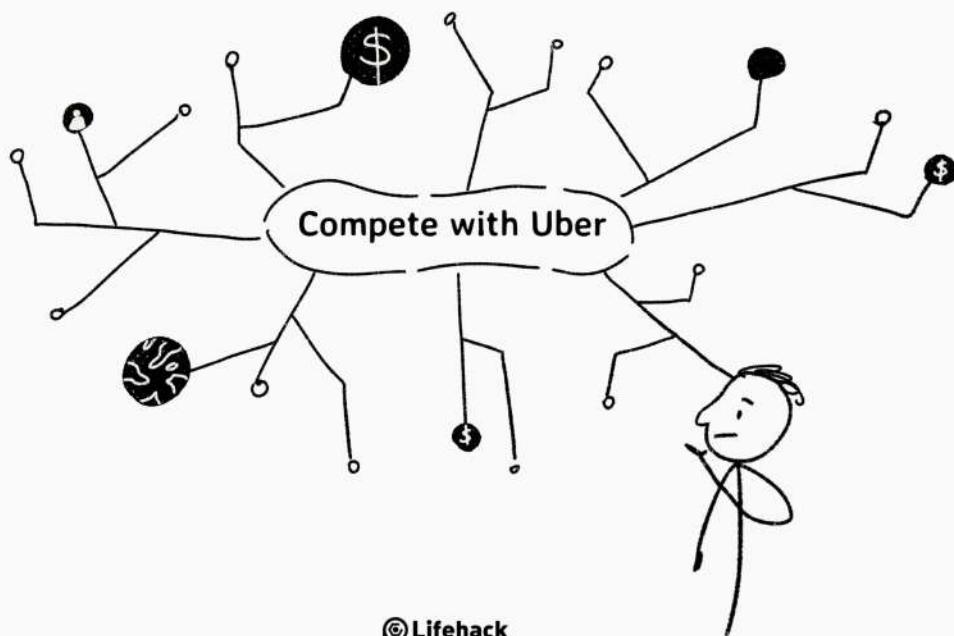
All of these ideas came to revolutionize their respective fields, and none of them came fully formed at the very beginning. Our view of how great ideas are born is thus inaccurate and is even potentially harmful.

We murder good ideas that are incubating

Usually when we hear about these ideas, it is when they are at their most successful. We don't see the weeks, months, and years where the initial idea was developed, or the successes and early failures of the business. As a result we naturally assume the ideas were fantastic and fully formed from the start.

We assume that is where good ideas come from.A study has shown that the human brain favors any action or option which uses the least amount of energy.((The Globe and Mail: Humans are hard-wired for laziness, study finds)) So where it might be more useful to come up with ten different ideas for us to work on, we struggle to come up with one to save up energy. So we try very hard to come up with a fantastic idea.

But even if we do come up with an idea, we have no idea whether it is good or not because it doesn't have concrete details on how it's going to work. Without the details and a plan to take action on the idea, we judge its failure early before it can incubate into something great. Unless an idea is executed, our brains are unable to determine whether an idea is going to be great or not.

Think about the companies mentioned at the beginning of this article. The idea for each one of them came from the creators trying fulfill a need, they found themselves faced with a particular problem (like failing to find a good taxi as in the case with Uber), and as a result they came up with a random idea directly related to it, that random idea became the solution to it.

But if we think we will come up with the next big idea without placing ourselves in the right context, and don't allow for ideas to come to us naturally, then it is guaranteed that they won't come to us at all. Instead we get stuck.

The truth is, good ideas are random

One day you might come up with ten ideas, of those ten, one might be an okay idea. We might often instinctively reject an idea that we judge to merely be "okay". However, an okay idea can become a fantastic idea with work, and ideas that are truly great from the start are so rare that they might as well not exist.

It's like with novel writing. A truly brilliant book tends to be the product of months if not years of hard work, of endless re-writes. But as we read the novel at the time it is finished, we assume it was great from the start.
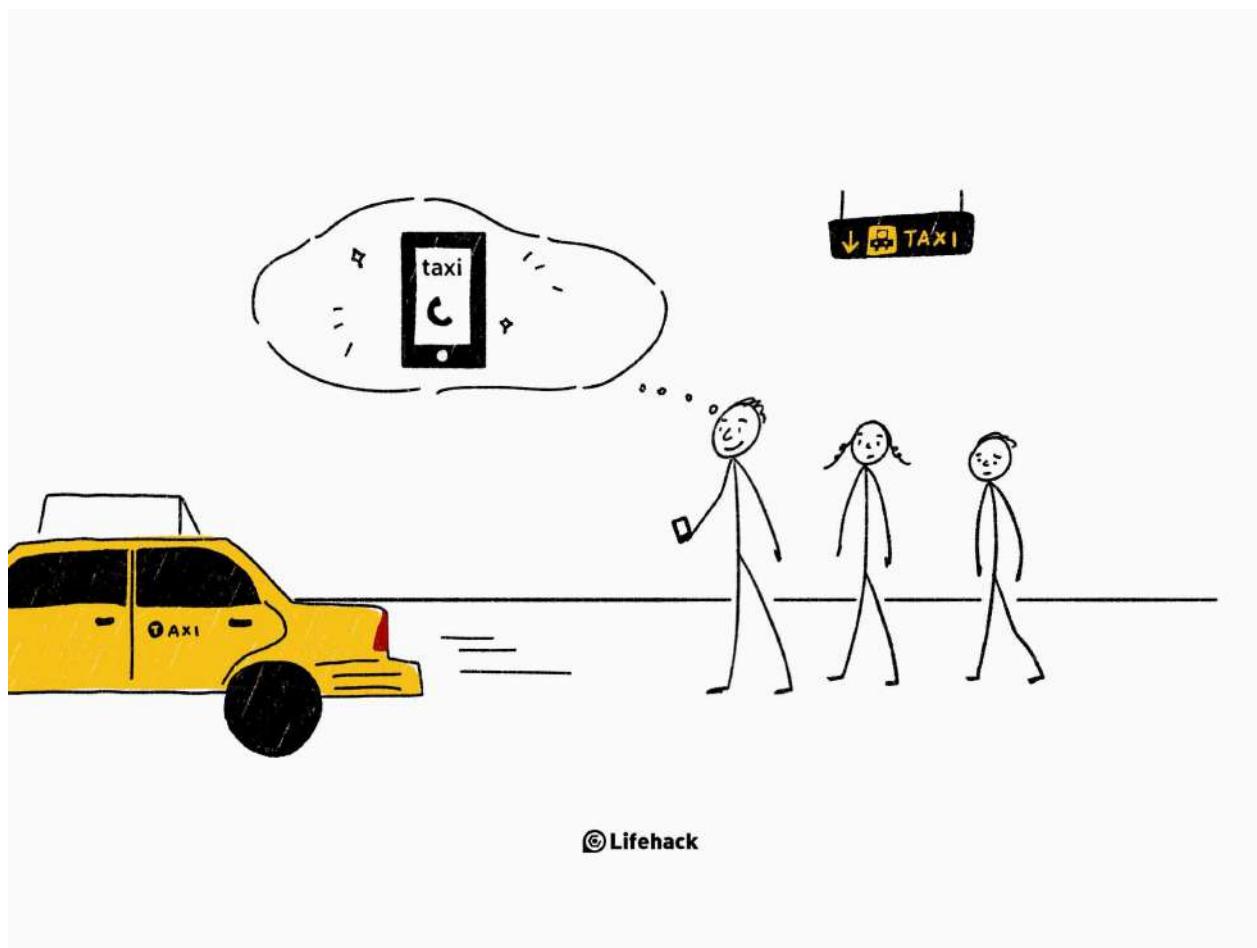
There is a famous story about Jack Kerouac, an American novelist, who wrote his famous novel *On the Road* over a three week period, almost without stopping for a break. For this to have been possible, surely the idea must have been brilliant from the start right? Well, this famous story isn't true.

Sure, he once typed up a draft of it in three weeks. But from him coming up with the idea, to finishing the book took over seven years. The ideas for the story came to him naturally while he was travelling, or at times he wrote about things that actually happened to him. There

was never a point where he suddenly had this brilliant idea that he was able to quickly turn into a masterpiece of literature.

All that is needed is the right stimulation

Great ideas then come from what we see, what we hear, the people we speak to, and most importantly, a great idea can come as the solution to a problem, (like what we saw with Twitter, Uber, and Airbnb). This can be tricky, it can often be easy to be disheartened when faced with a problem.

But that's what innovation is, true innovation comes from either resolving a problem or finding a gap in the market which can be filled by a great idea. So next time you are faced with a problem, see this as an opportunity. Even if a solution exists, you might be able to think of a better one.

Your next great idea might not seem great at first. It might just seem like an okay idea, a mediocre one, or even a bad one, all ideas need work. So don't judge any at first, let ideas come naturally and write them down. It doesn't matter how bad they seem, just write them down.

Don't worry about organizing them either, in fact it's good not to. You might miss a good idea while you're working on the organization. Organizing at this stage will just mean that you're giving yourself an extra job to do which may slow you down or even make you lose motivation.

Remember, great ideas don't come fully formed, so don't try to force them.

Jotting Down Ideas Makes You Smarter

An adult has an average of 50,000 thoughts every day. Now try to recall 100 of those thoughts from earlier today. Pretty hard, right?

It's normal to forget most of them as our brains have to filter out unnecessary information so that we don't go insane. ((io9: Our brains deliberately make us forget things, to prevent insanity)) **The problem is that we forget a lot of great ideas along the way**.

Great ideas often come when a person is unprepared

Most of the time great ideas come when your brain is in "diffused mode": Thoughts come to you in this state when you're not intently focused, like when you're daydreaming or zoning out in the shower. Creative ideas come to us during this state of mind because this is when our minds are the most relaxed. This is when our brains connect different neural pathways to come up with brand new ideas (the same as how creativity allows us to connect the dots, our brains do this naturally in this state). The problem is that because our brains are so relaxed, there's no intention to mark down ideas that come along.

Never trust your brain: it's bad at memory

Very often the ideas that come to us during diffuse mode can be a bit abstract. Out of the box thinking, if you will. This is your best content. The high level, creative, new ideas that are going to take the world by storm.

Remember the genius, ground-breaking idea you came up with in the shower? The one that was going to revolutionize the world as we know it? Of course you can't remember. Your monumental idea slipped through the cracks of your memory, never to be heard from again because you didn't take the time to write it down.

In today's race against time, we just can't spare an extra moment to jot down the ideas that constantly pass through our heads. Some people may think that it's even a waste of time. We think that if the thought is that important, we will remember it later and put it into action. But we don't. And we're just left with that empty vagueness- "I know I was on to something, what was it again?"

Don't be lazy, jot down the great idea no matter how confident you are that you'll remember it

Keep recording tools within reach, but not directly in sight. If you set out a notebook and pen directly in front of you, you are no longer in diffuse mode and thoughts are not free flowing. But you want the notebook to be close enough, so that when the thoughts do come to you, it takes very little mental and physical effort to quickly jot them down.

Smartphone apps such as Evernote are a great option for this. Some others are recording apps, a waterproof notebook for the shower, your laptop, or simply a notebook and pen (this is my personal favorite, more authentic.)

Resist the urge to organize

It's so easy to fall into the trap of immediately organizing your thoughts as they come to you. Don't do it. Organizing is a separate task for later, when you switch into focus mode (the opposite of diffuse mode).

Stick to the process of free thinking and writing down ideas and leaving them alone until later. If you try to organize them as they come, you'll lose many ideas because you are too focused on a single idea. You'll also lose motivation because you're loading yourself up with work and complicating the process.

Review your ideas from time to time

Now that you have the ideas written down, you need to reinforce the ideas to turn them into something bigger. You should review your ideas around 3 times a week.

While reviewing you can filter out some of the less useful ideas, organize them, and start developing the potentially successful ones.

Remember, most people have plenty of great ideas, just very few of them bother to jot them down. And those who do are the ones who succeed.

Start Looking for Problems, Not Great Ideas

When asked how he would spend his time if he was given an hour to solve a thorny problem, Einstein said he'd spend 55 minutes defining the problem and alternatives and 5 minutes solving it.

You've probably used a handy invention called "coffee sleeves" if you've ever visited a coffee shop. These insulators make it bearable to hold that super-hot cup of coffee. Jay Sorensen is the inventor of the coffee sleeve. He came up with this idea when he was driving his daughter to school when he spilled a cup of coffee in his lap, because the coffee was too hot to hold.

It's common wisdom that innovative ideas must be original, new, and a flash of creativity out of the blue. But this belief is a real obstacle to creativity.

Jay Sorensen didn't create the coffee sleeve because he was setting out to innovative. He needed to solve a problem.

Innovation is not about creating something from nothing.

There are problems everywhere, as long as you pay attention to them. Lots of great inventions come from the daily problems people encounter.

When it's raining and you don't want to wear clunky, unfashionable rain boots - but you don't want to get your feet wet? There go the Dry Steppers. You want to bring a water bottle to work, but the shape of normal water bottles don't work with your briefcase? Someone came up with the idea of Letter paper shaped bottles.

True breakthroughs happen when you notice problems and create solutions. Problems stimulate you to really think about what can be improved. **Observing problems is a good start.**

Different Levels of Problems

There are different types of problems. Some are easier to stimulate innovative ideas, some are more difficult. Finding out the type of problem you have identified helps you to know your effort needed to create new ideas.

Type 1: Problems with Good Solutions Available

Difficulty Level: ★★★

Some problems already have good solutions available. For example, in hot and humid climates, people have adjusted to the use of fans and air conditioning. It would take a huge breakthrough in order to think of a solution superior to what's already available.

So, a brand-new invention to address hot climates would be a very difficult innovation to accomplish. There is **no clear need for a new solution**.

Type 2: Long Existing Problems with No Solutions Yet Found

Difficulty Level: ★★

A more intermediate scenario is when a problem has existed for a long time, and no solutions have yet emerged.

These intermediate problems are often very hard to fix because of their scale or complexity. For example, poverty is a huge problem, and everyone knows that. But nobody has "fixed" it probably because it's hard to fix, and there are limitations on the resources to fix it.

When anything is possible, it's difficult to know when and how to kick it off. But this situation can also be positive. With intermediate problems, **you have no restrictions, and so you're free to try out creative ideas**. Take this as a source of inspiration. You might not have the resources to apply your solution right now, but that shouldn't hold you back. Think of a solution and try it out when the timing is right.

Type 3: Problems That Have Flawed Solutions Available

Difficulty Level: ★

Finally, there are easy innovations. These include problems that do have available solutions, but those solutions are flawed. You can **take what's already there and improve on it**. For example, the smartphone is in many ways an improvement of the original cell phone; it has added a lot of new functionality to an old technology.

While you might feel inspired to tackle a 3-star problem, you might **try to kickstart your innovation with an 2-star or 1-star problem first**.

Start with a Problem Within Your Reach

There are tons of problems out there, in every conceivable area of life. Look for one that is within **your own field of expertise** - where you can excel by using your knowledge and skills. By narrowing the scope of the problem, you also won't get distracted by problems that you can't control.

In your own field of work, you see recurring problems all the time. Find one that bothers you and **dig deep into the root causes**. Ask yourself, why does this happen all the time? Are there layers of causes? Understanding the problem deeply helps you think of more and better approaches to it.

Once you have identified the causes, turn to solutions.

First, are there any existing workarounds? If there are some, why aren't they effective? Perhaps they don't really address the root causes, or only address some of them. Consider how you might improve the available solution. If it's possible to improve an existing solution, it could be easier to implement than something brand-new.

If there are no available solutions, then start brainstorming new solutions. In this scenario, it could be pretty tough to fix the problem outright. So instead of aiming to fix the root cause immediately, try to target individual layers of causes one at a time. This piecemeal kind of approach can help you work your way up to a complete solution.

Stop Thinking of New Ideas, Find Problems

Don't look for a great idea. Look for a good problem. Observe the troubles that you come across in your everyday life.

It's by addressing these problems that you can make the most positive impact on the world.

Creativity Is Not Inborn

What if I told you creative people are found to be more attractive by others? According to a study done by Christopher Watkins,

> "Creativity can enhance your attractiveness both as a potential date and as a potential social partner" ((LIVESCIENCE: Why Some Creative People are More Attractive)).

This may sound great, but there is more to the study than just this. Other factors that come into play include gender and physical appearance. Surprisingly, the effects of creativity are stronger for average looking people than people who are genetically gifted. Creativity is also thought to be more beneficial for men((LIVESCIENCE: Why Some Creative People are More Attractive)).

At this point you may be thinking, "HOW DO I MAKE MYSELF MORE CREATIVE!"

Before we get ahead of ourselves, let us first define what creativity actually is.

Creativity Is Intelligence Having Fun.

What is creativity? Rollo May, the author of *The Courage to Create* said,

> Creativity is "the process of bringing something new into being. Creativity requires passion and commitment. It brings to our awareness what was previously hidden and points to new life,"

As a matter of fact, creativity does not only make one more attractive; creativity also accompanies with many benefits. Below you shall see some of them:

- **Become a better problem solver:** creativity allows one to overcome challenge with innovative methods.
- **Save Money**: creativity yields inner fulfilment, which reduces the urge to consume.
- **Embrace Freedom**: creativity helps one fully engage with him or herself, surpassing all detrimental self-judgement.
- **Relieve Stress**: creativity invites us to fully utilise our mind, our hand, and our energy, which awards us contented happiness ((Lillstreet: 7 WAYS WE BENEFIT FROM CREATIVITY)).

There Is a Big Common Misconception about Creativity.

Many people have a misconception about creativity — it is something inborn. If we aren't born creative, there is no hope. This is not true. Demian Farnworth, a Senior Content Writer at Lutheran Church Extension Fund, says this is not only a myth, but also an excuse.

The truth is anyone can learn to be creative, including you!

Now that we know what creativity is, it's time to learn how to become creative.

What Separates Creative People from the Majority is that They Think Outside the Norms.

A change in mindset is the first step to becoming creative. Think outside of the box! If you run into a problem and can't solve the problem, then the problem usually isn't the problem, the problem is the way you are looking at the problem. "Divergent thinking is essential for a creative mind," says Eddie Opera, a neuroscientist who has spent years studying the brain and creativity ((The Atlantic: Secrets of a Creative Brain)).

There are both pros and cons to thinking outside the box. The pros are that you will become a better problem solver. Switching the way you think is essential. It can make an almost impossible problem become seemingly simple. Thinking outside the box is also good for innovation and communication.

The cons are few and far between. The major con to thinking outside the box is that it can be extremely frustrating. If you're not feeling creative at the moment, then stop. Don't return doing whatever it is you're doing until you're in the proper mindset.

Moreover, Creative People Do Not Let Others' Opinions Bother Them.

Self-consciousness is an assassin of creativity. How can you be creative if you're constantly worrying about what other people think?

Put other people's opinions to the side and just be you. Let your mind go to work. **Creativity is often sparked when we are alone.** Find yourself a quiet, judgment-free zone in order to boost creativity.

Creative People Understand the Importance of Harboring a Clear Goal.

Creativity is innovation. Innovation is progress. And progress leads to somewhere different than the starting point.

To become more creative, start with an end vision. This will allow you to develop a path; however, this is not a set path. Think of all the different ways you can reach the end point. This will get your creative juices flowing and allow you to think in more innovative ways. If you get stuck don't worry. Everyone gets stuck, even some of the best minds in the world ((Charles Chu: Isaac Asimov: How to Never Run Out of Ideas Again)).

Creative People Also Excite Their Brains with New Events Consistently.

Switch up your daily routine. Go to different places and meet new people. These places and people can provide you with new insights and ideas that you've never had before. There have been studies that show how new experiences affect the neurons in the brain to help boost creativity ((The Startup: Create More than you Consume)).

> "When you meet new people or try unexpected events, it creates an idea cocktail in your brain," says Mikael Cho, founder of Unsplash and Crewlabs.

Your Life Will Be More Colourful Once You Introduce Creativity into Your Life

Life is more fun when we are creative! You'll become a more interesting person with cooler ideas. You may even find yourself out and about with some hot dates (wink wink). Pick up these common characteristics of creative people to help yourself become more creative!

The Decreasing Value of Creativity

The modern world provides seemingly endless opportunities for entertainment, distraction and the automation of some of the more mindless tasks that our forebears would have spent their time on. In theory, 21st-century life should be packed with output from people whose minds have been freed to think, imagine and create, but is that what we are seeing? Well, no, it's not.

We often see attempts of minimising risks in creative industries these days.

What we are seeing is endless re-hashing of the same ideas: sequels, prequels, remakes and re-imaginings abound, and the mainstream arts have narrowed to the point where film studios and record labels seem to be putting out very slightly altered versions of the same films and songs over and over again. Books that are particularly popular are made into films, and Hollywood casts tried-and-tested A-listers into leading roles whether or not they fit the part, simply in an attempt to guarantee a good turnout at the box office.

The film industry will only invest in scripts which follow an established format; record labels want bands to have a proven audience before offering them a record deal, and publishers want authors with a track-record of making the best-seller lists. Creative talent is secondary to the ability to market oneself and artistic ability is dwarfed by the overwhelming desire of big business to minimise their risks and stick with the familiar.((Dan Schawbel: How Our Risk Averse Society Kills Creativity))

The most important thing to individuals has been changed.

Where big corporations fear to tread, however, the individual apparently rushes in. With more than 60% of workers stating((Wildgoose: Friends in the Workplace Survey)) that they value happiness over financial gain when it comes to their jobs, it appears that a pleasant working environment has a value that a pay-packet simply can't match. All over the country, people are placing good friendships ahead of their incomes and are more motivated by the idea of going out for drinks and spending time with colleagues that they get along with than they are by earning more.

Ironically, we are often tied to our phones and not freeing our minds to think and ponder.

However, those same individuals are struggling to free themselves from the tyranny of the hand-held devices which are packed with distractions and diversions which pull their attention away from connecting with the people whose company they crave. With the ability to do almost anything on a piece of technology which you have in your pocket all day, comes the inability to enjoy genuine experiences, to allow our minds to wander, to experience the moments that inevitably pass you by when you are glued to the latest game on your phone.

The Big Brother's impact is also limiting our creativity.

Alongside risk aversion on the part of the major players in the creative industries, the increasing availability of apps providing constant distraction from reality, and the internal conflicts inherent in human interactions, we also have to contend with attempts by the government to limit our freedom. With many believing that common sense is being eroded and replaced by increasingly restrictive legislation, the impact on the individual's ability to act autonomously is potentially devastating.

But the ponderously slow speed at which the legislature moves has, time and time again, proved that legal solutions to social problems are an inefficient way of dealing with the issues that modern life throws in our path. Take the example of vaping – many believe that e-cigarettes should be classified in the same way as tobacco, and therefore should be banned wherever smoking is. However, those who have chosen e-cigarettes as a healthier alternative to traditional smoking believe((Vape Club: Vaping vs. Smoking: The Safety Debate)) that promoting a smoking alternative which doesn't have a damaging effect on their health should be a priority. Waiting for government to collect the data, take advice and make a decision on whether to introduce laws which classify vaping could take so long that by the time they are introduced, a balance has been found that the majority are happy with.

Although society is killing creativity, there are still opportunities to retain it.

Modern society is made up of individuals who rarely have a quiet moment to examine their own thoughts and feelings, but who prioritise friendship over money, operating in an environment in which billion-pound organisations attempt to manipulate them into

conforming. Creativity may struggle to penetrate the cynical profiteering that we have all become accustomed to, but as long as individuals can appreciate the value of originality and authenticity, there is hope that those qualities will retain their value.

The Anatomy of Procrastination

By procrastinating, a person doesn't know what they have done for around 218 minutes a day. In other words, **more than 3 hours go missing every single day, and about 55 days — almost 2 months are lost every year.** Imagine every night you put 100 bucks in your wallet, and the next morning when you open it, 30 bucks are missing and you don't know where the money has gone. This is what procrastination does.

We all procrastinate, and we procrastinate a lot.

Even if you do make an effort to fight procrastination, the tide is against you.

Modern Living Has Made It Even Easier to Procrastinate

Not only is procrastination tough to beat - but it's getting even tougher. The percentage of chronic procrastinators has grown from about 5 percent in 1978, to 26 percent in 2007, as shown in a study by University of Calgary.((Gazette Times: Professor's study gives procrastination a bad name))

In today's always-connected age, there are constant temptations to choose procrastination over action. Checking the latest news, updating social media accounts, and chatting digitally with friends from around the world. It's literally a non-stop cycle of news, notifications and quirky YouTube videos.

Now, please don't get me wrong. The internet is a great thing, and has brought about a communications revolution. The problem is that **without control on your part, the internet can suck your life and energy - just like an electronic vampire.**

And you don't need to take my word for it either. A recent study by Webtrate showed that **email and social media stole an hour of productivity per workday for about 36 percent of people, while 16 percent lost more than an hour**.((The Week: Why we can't stop procrastinating, according to science))

The trend towards procrastination is a powerful one - but technology is not the the only thing to blame.

At Its Core, Procrastination Is About Our Emotions

It turns out that procrastination is at the core of each of us.

Procrastination is strongly linked to our emotions. Let's briefly talk about biology — the limbic system. This system acts as the brain's emotional center. It's developed to manage circuitry attributed to the fight-or-flight response.((Boundless: The Limbic System)) In other words, the limbic system primes us to 'feel' first.

When our feelings are negative (e.g., when we hear bad news), we look for ways to distract ourselves. Usually, this involves giving into instant pleasures such as: chocolate, social media and TV marathons.

The same thing applies to procrastination. Say you need to complete a project at work that involves tons of research. Unfortunately for you, research is something that you don't enjoy, so you find yourself constantly looking for ways to avoid starting (let alone finishing) the project. This might involve making lots of coffee or tea, chatting with colleagues, or working on anything other than the project.

Procrastination and emotions are eternally linked, and unless you discover how to step out of this union, you'll be forever destined to be weak and hesitant. Fortunately, there are ways to break free.

The 5 Procrastination Personalities

Our instinct to navigate to instant pleasure first has led to five distinct 'procrastinator personalities.' Let's take a look at each of these personalities - and see if you can identify yourself in the process.

1. The Perfectionist

Being perfect is the pleasure perfectionists want. But often this leads to them being too scared to show any imperfections. Because of this, they frequently fail to complete things, as they're forever seeking the perfect timing or approach. Tasks end up never being completed, because in the eyes of the perfectionist, things are never perfect enough.

You've no doubt encountered these types (and you may even be one of them) in your day-to-day life. In the office, perfectionists can be found staring intently at their screens, as they continually make minor changes to their spreadsheets, documents and presentations. Instead of finishing something, they get caught up in a never-ending cycle of additions, edits, and deletions. Someone needs to tell them that perfection is rarely realized.

2. The Dreamer

Dreaming is fun when compared to real life - which involves lots of challenges and difficulties. It's no wonder that a dreamer prefers to stay in the dreaming stage. That way, they don't have to work for real, or deal with any negativity or stress.

Dreaming gives this type of people a false sense of achievement, as in their minds, they envision big, ambitious plans. Unfortunately for them, these plans will most likely stay as dreams, and they'll never accomplish anything truly worthwhile.

You probably know someone like this. Every time you meet them, they tell you of their grandiose ideas and goals, but not once do they state what they're doing to bring these dreams into reality. After years of hearing their stories, you come to a valid conclusion: they're just dreamers.

3. The Avoider

Avoiders have bought into the line that 'by doing nothing, bad things won't happen.'

In reality, avoiders have developed a fear of making mistakes or doing anything wrong. Their way to avoid these mishaps, is to do nothing at all. In the end, they may make few mistakes - but they also see few accomplishments.

In the workplace, avoiders are easy to spot. They seldom speak, preferring to keep themselves to themselves. They also lack proactivity, instead, they favor the motto: 'I'll just do the bare minimum.' They may regard themselves as solid and reliable workers, but in reality, they lack drive, ambition and the spark of life.

4. The Crisis-maker

Crisis-makers are those who believe that deadlines can push them to do better. Instead of having a schedule to complete their work - they prefer to enjoy time doing their own thing before the deadline comes around.

It's most likely an unconscious thing, but crisis-makers evidently believe that starting early will sacrifice their time for pleasure. This is reinforced in their minds and feelings, by the many times they manage to get away with burning the midnight oil. Often they sacrifice the quality of their work because of rushing it.

Without naming the individual, let me tell you the story of a crisis-maker I used to work with. He was a party lover, and frequently came to work late - and not in the best state either. He was blessed with charisma, and so was able to come across in meetings as focused, organized and determined. The real story was that his work would be left until the very last minute, when he would then make a massive effort to finish it. Sometimes this went well, other times his work was littered with careless and costly mistakes.

5. The Busy Procrastinator

A busy procrastinator is certainly busy - but they lack the ability to prioritize their work. They do what they feel like they should do, rather than thinking through what they really need to do.

Prioritizing tasks is a step that takes extra time, so a busy procrastinator will feel it's not worth it. In these cases, they delay doing what's really important, because they don't actually recognize it as being important. Because of this, they usually end up doing a lot of effortless tasks that don't contribute much to a project.

I come across busy procrastinators all the time. They look super busy, but their output and results reveal their lack of organizational skills. They're incessantly busy on low-impact tasks, but seem oblivious to urgent, high-impact tasks. It's the equivalent to a thirsty cat licking the outside of a bowl filled with milk - its efforts are focused on the wrong place!

If you suffer from procrastination, identify which of the above personality types you most closely match. Once you've done that, take some time to reflect on how you became like that, and then think of ways to step outside of your conditioned behavior. For example, if you're a dreamer, look for ways to turn your dreams into reality. In most cases, you'll need an end goal - and a plan to get there. You'll also make it easy on yourself if you take small, but certain, steps at a time.

Understand It to Beat It

Everyone has a different reason to procrastinate, but every reason points to our prime to feel first. By understanding how your emotions make procrastination happen, you can figure out the exact action to turn around the negativity.

I've written another article about how to control your emotions better to beat procrastination, read it and find out how to adjust your tasks to avoid the negative emotions.

Don't let procrastination steal your life. Be active, be confident, and become a person of accomplishment.

Your Workstation Might Be Making You Unproductive

As a personal coach with over 100 employees, one of the most common questions I receive from time to time is **"how can I be more productive?"** The only way to really get ahead is by increasing your productivity. It's a pretty straight forward concept. When we get more done, we reach our goal more quickly. We all have the same amount of time in the day, but some people just manage to get more done. Surely, there must be some secrets to this super-human level of efficiency. But what?

Throughout the years, I have passed down different techniques and hacks to boost productivity to my collegaues with reasonable success. But one day it dawned on me. I had been overlooking the most important element of a productive work space; **the work space itself.**

Don't just organize, organize with purpose

As I observed the Lifehack office, I noticed that there was one distinctive variable. All of my colleauges had been integrating the same productivity techniques that I had taught them, but still for some reason some had more success than others.

I noticed that there was definitely a direct connection between those who had organized work stations and their level of productivity. I asked each individual what the thought process what behind their desk set-ups. Not at all to my surprise, those who admitted to organizing their workstations with purpose were more productive than those who didn't.

Why? Because not only do they take the time to organize, but **they organize tactfully to increase productivity**. (I am even de-cluttering my desk as I write this!) This makes a whole lot of sense because your environment contributes largely to your success.

Think about it like this: if you were on a diet, you wouldn't surround yourself with junk-food, right? Well, if you want to think clearly, you shouldn't surround yourself with distractions.

Create the ideal environment to enhance your productivity

I decided to pick the brains of the more productive individuals in the office. This way I could harness some of their wisdom for helpful tips for organization and increased efficiency. I found that they all had these habits in common:

1. Keep distractions on your unfamiliar side

By your unfamiliar side, I mean your less dominant hand. If you are right handed, keep your phone on the left side of the desk so are less likely to reach for it. Understandably, you want to keep your phone around in case of emergencies. But checking your phone is probably so habitual that it's become muscle memory at this point. Sometimes you grab your phone without even realizing it. Constantly doing this will break your focus and disrupt your workflow. To avoid this, make it inconvenient to reach.

2. The larger your trashcan, the better

This may seem slightly trivial, but it's actually imperative for improving efficiency. The goal here is clarity. So you want to have a nearby receptacle to dump all of your unwanted and unneeded clutter before it takes over your life.

Let's say that you've just finished brainstorming and have utilized all of the ideas you had written down. Now you have no need for that pile of papers holding your old ideas. But your small trash can is full. Instead of walking across the office to dump the papers, you just set them off to the side. It starts out with just one pile of papers, but the it turns into a habit of, "I'll take care of this later." And the next thing you know, you're buried with outdated and unneeded items. Is that a used tissue? Gross!

Now the items you actually need are mixed up with unnecessary items, which will get frustrating after a while. Save yourself the trouble. Clean as you go.

3. Have a designated "deal with later" area

As your work days drag on, you'll start to realize that you're not getting as much done as you'd like. As tasks and projects pile up, you find yourself battling distractions and losing your focus, not to mention becoming overwhelmed by your workload.

Lighten the load a bit. Create a "deal with later" area. This could be a folder or shelf where you store your tasks. By doing this, your brain will register that you have received the project, but then you can file it away so it does not deter you from your current task. Each time you get distracted, it takes twice and long to refocus. Set aside a time to clear out your "deal with later" area, and get to it when you can.

4. Keep only the essentials on your desk

The presence of organizational tools may make you feel like you are being more productive, but remember less is more. You only need one pen to write with, one highlighter to highlight with, one notebook to write on and one stack of post-its until you run out. Anything else is unnecessary, and will just make your work space a mess. Besides, you want to spend your precious time working, not deciding on which pen to use.

Keep these items to your dominant side, on your otherwise clutter-free desk. That way you have all that you need right on hand.

5. Have an organized drawer for the almost- essentials

I know you love that polka dot stapler and matching tape dispenser. But they're not vital items for your productivity, are they? You want to keep them close, but not out in the open where they might distract you. Instead, keep almost-essential items like these that you use on a daily basis in a well-organized drawer.

Keeping items like these out of sight gives your brain less of an opportunity to wander, helping to keep you on track. You might not think that a stapler is going to hinder your workflow, but you'd be surprised where your mind will drift to when you're stuck on a task.

6. Always have water on hand

And lots of it. It is the elixir of life and productivity. I noticed during my observations that the most productive people always have a large container of water on their desk at all times. This is because when they become focused and throw themselves into their work, they often forget to drink water.

Having water on hand saves them less trips of getting up to get it, therefore they have less distractions throughout the day. Not to mention, staying hydrated helps them to think clearly and therefore be more productive. Remember, clarity corresponds with efficiency.
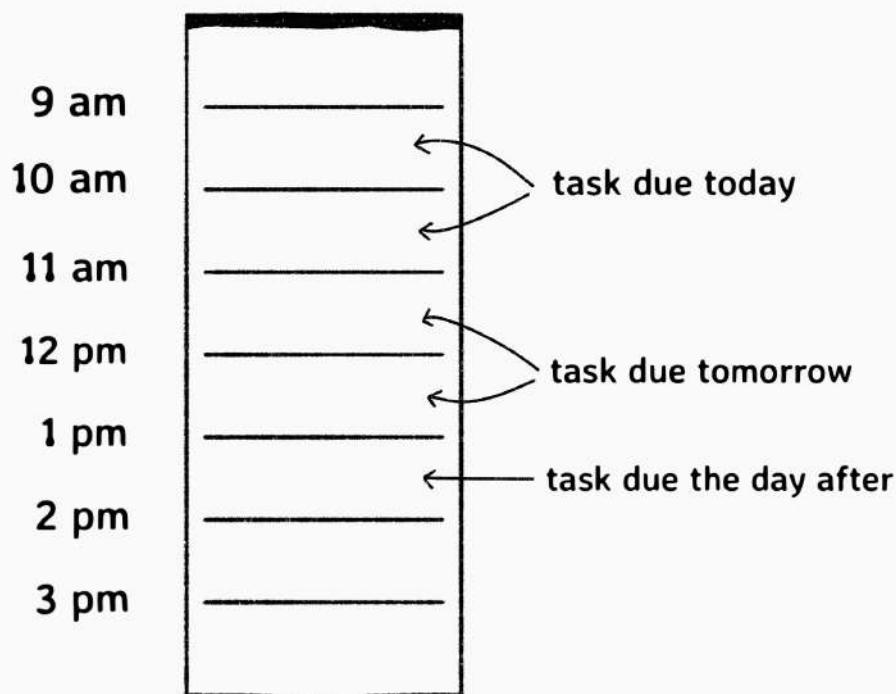
Deadlines Push You to Work Harder, but Not Smarter

When you start your workday, you may welcome the tasks that arise to fill your time. Work comes to you with no rhyme or reason, but you do it. You tackle things as they come, and you turn everything in by the deadline.

It may seem that you're successful because you turn in your work on time. The problem is, you don't know how to effectively plan for a day's work.

Most people live and die by deadlines

Time is an important factor to consider when you're completing tasks. Many of us chase deadlines or knock out the easiest tasks first to feel a sense of accomplishment. Sometimes, we spend too long on some tasks, and scramble to do everything else.

You may have 10 working hours in a given day, and it's your job to do as much work as possible in that time. It's easy to work all day and accomplish very little.

You have to be intentional about priorities. If you only worry about filling time slots and meeting deadlines, you may neglect more important, high-value tasks.

But living by deadlines gets you into trouble

Humans are terrible at guessing how long it takes to complete projects. Guessing is even more challenging when we are developing something new. We're not machines, and our day-to-day outputs don't tend to fit into neat algorithms. When we estimate completion date on a project, we don't take into account the non-project related work that creeps into our schedules. Those emails, meetings, and team member commitments that crop up at the last minute cost time.

We often associate dates and days with certain emotions. For example, do you find yourself as productive on Friday afternoon as you are on Tuesday? Relative estimation of when you'll complete a task doesn't take into consideration how feelings affect work.

To top it off, you can give several teams the same task, and they'll all complete them in a slightly different time frame. Their velocity on work turnaround, calculated in points, will vary along with their time frame. Setting arbitrary times for finishing work makes it impossible to use velocity as a selling point in your team's effectiveness unless your team performs significantly better than your competitors.

How to make guesses more accurate

Instead of relying on deadlines and dates to stay productive, you can take a more objective approach. The management technique known as scrum can help you accomplish this. In the book Scrum: The Art of Doing Twice the Work in Half the Time, the **Scrum** technique allows you to produce better estimates for planning timelines by using a system of points instead of units of time.

When you're working to solve complex problems, there are usually several teams involved. It's impossible to guess how long it will take to complete a project on your own or communicate your team's needs to other groups. Your role in a project may require little effort, but the teams around you may have to expend considerable effort for their part. You need the input of every team involved to arrive at a reasonable estimation.

Use story points

The most productive teams have switched from setting deadlines to deciding how long tasks will take based on a process known as scrum or agile estimation. They use story points (the input of various teams involved) to understand the relative difficulty of each task.((Atlassian: The Secrets Behind Story Points and Agile Estimation))

Workers rate the degree of difficulty using a Fibonacci-sequence: 0, 0.5, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 20. This abstraction pushes the team to make tougher decisions around the difficulty of work.

They assign numeric value to their respective portion, and play "planning poker." In planning poker, workers hold up a number that they think represents the level of difficulty for that project.

Make sure everyone's on the same page

When all parties agree about the numbers in planning poker, they know that they are all on the same page about the timeline. If the numbers differ, the teams must discuss how everyone reached their numbers.

Sometimes, we have no idea what obstacles other teams face. This method opens a dialogue about what it will take to actualize a project. Differing opinions in the difficulty of a project can address whether everyone is working on the same scale.

Don't complicate the points

It's best to set an upper limit of 20 story points when you are trying to make a project less complicated. Anything greater than that needs to be broken into smaller attainable steps. Breaking tasks down into smaller steps keeps teams from becoming overwhelmed.

Hindsight is 20/20

When you're trying to give an accurate estimation for how long a project will take, don't forget to think about past experience. If you've done similar jobs, consider how long they took to complete and what pitfalls you experienced. Think about the number of story points that particular aspects cost.

The more data you can refer back to, the closer you'll be to landing an accurate estimate. Besides, you may be able to improve on previous methods so that you can complete your work more efficiently.

Stop being a slave for deadline

Setting a deadline based on how long you think the task will take can leave you scrambling or turning in substandard work. There's no reason for you to work harder when you could be working smarter.
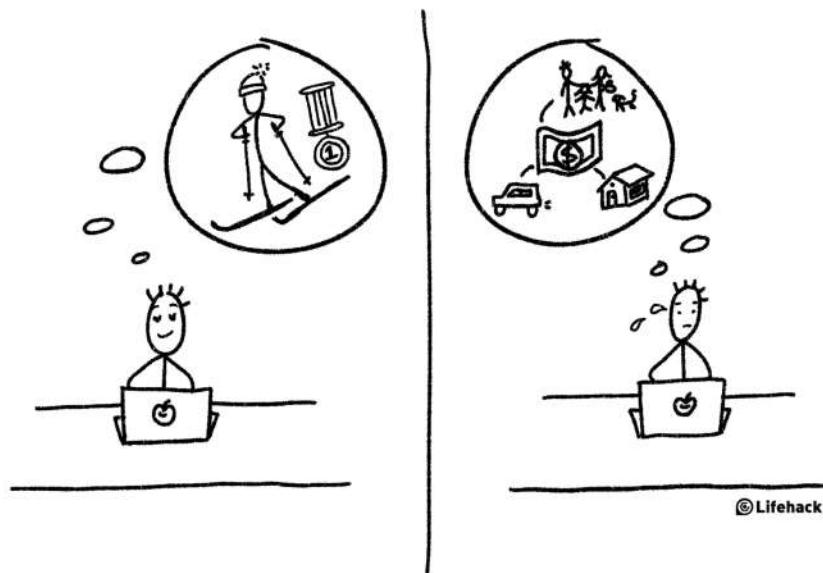
By thinking about your work in the abstract story points system instead of time, you'll be able to communicate your needs and understand the needs of others much more clearly. You'll know when you need to break tasks into smaller steps, and you'll have a more efficient way of thinking about past experiences with similar projects.

Stop Waiting, Go Ask For Your Dream Job

If you were looking for a new job, how would you go about finding one? Instinctively you'd probably start off by filtering through all of the common job archive websites; Craigslist, Indeed, Monster, etc. in order to find something related to your field. Which is fine, if you don't mind settling.

We have been programmed to work this way, to take whatever job is convenient in order to pay the bills and support our lifestyle. For many this system works well enough. But this is how people fall into complacent jobs that don't truly satisfy them.

If you want to land the job of your dreams, you're going to have to go out there and get it
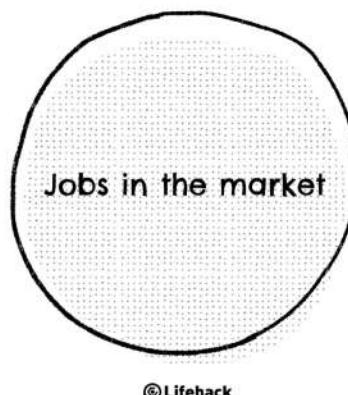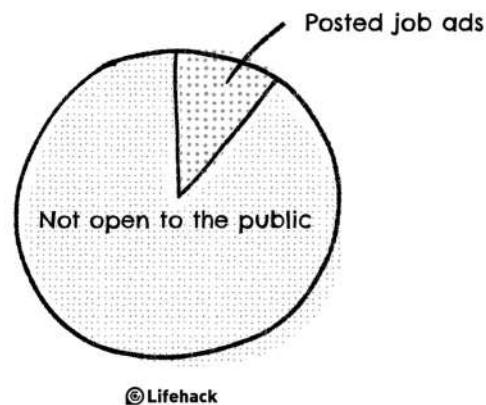
The truth is, the best jobs aren't listed. Around 80% of opportunities in the market are not open to the public and can only be acquired internally. So if you're basing your search on the 20% that have actually been listed, you're going to have a very difficult time landing that

dream job.
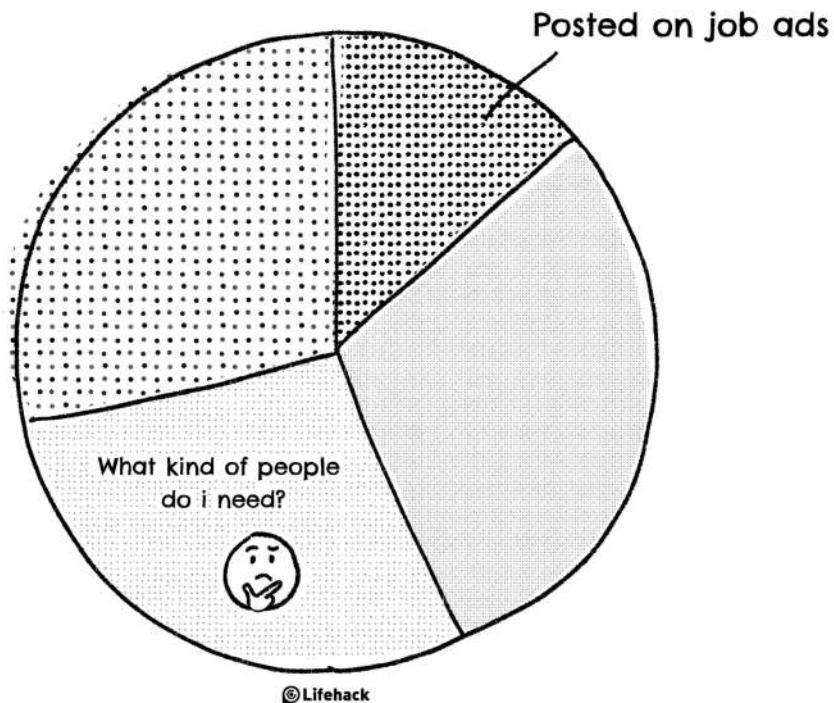
So instead, you'll end up with a job that "works for now." Eventually you'll come across the job you've been striving for and make the switch. **But what if that opportunity never comes?** You'll most likely fall into a routine with your sub-par job and justify it by saying that most people never get to have their dream job.

How can you solve that issue? **By taking the initiative and creating an opportunity.** But before you're able to finagle your way into your dream company, you must first understand why 80% of jobs are not available to the public, and how to work that fact to your advantage.

Jobs in the market

©Lifehack

Posted job ads

Not open to the public

Ⓒ Lifehack

1. Businesses are not sure what or who they are looking for

This is usually true for startup businesses that are trying to expand into a new market. It's uncommon ground, so it's tough to project what they really need.

If they don't know who or what they're looking for in order to move in a new direction, then it's nearly impossible to create a job ad for a position that does not yet exist.

What they need is human resources. A fresh perspective that can give them a new edge. This is the perfect opportunity for you to up-sell yourself and the value that you can bring to the company.

Take a look at their weaknesses and what could be improved. You could be the answer to all of their problems. Offer your skills in such a way that they can't afford not to have you.

2. Companies tend to train-up internal staff instead of hiring new employees.

Some employers don't want to go through the grueling trial and error of the interviewing process. Unsure if they'll be able to find the people with the skills they're looking for, they will train their already existing staff to do the job instead.

The mentality is, "the more I invest in my employees, they more likely they are to stay and contribute." While in some cases this may be true, it's not very cost efficient and may not work out as they hoped.

There is no certainty that the employees will stay, especially if there is a change in their job description. Many people are creatures of habit and want to stick to what they know.

It can be difficult to predict how much time could be wasted training employees to learn these new skills. And in that time you're taking man power away from already existing projects. In turn, those projects could be neglected and end up hurting the company.

This is your golden opportunity. Showcase the fact that you already possess the skills they are looking for. Explain the resources they could save by simply hiring you instead of training up their staff. Your drive and passion will make you stand out as the best cost-efficient choice.

3. The company truly does not have any openings.

There is still room for opportunity here. Similar to the previous points, you can scale the company for their weaknesses and needs, and offer yourself as the solution. You could bring ideas to light that probably would have never been considered.

Your attention to detail and willingness to improve will make you a valuable asset.

What you do for work is important because it affects your happiness too

Your dream job isn't going to fall into your lap. You need to be a little aggressive and create that opportunity. Even if the company of your dreams truly isn't looking for new employees right now, they will remember you if you make a good impression.

Your job doesn't have to just pay the bills. With the right career, you can find your purpose, devote yourself to your work, and live a meaningful life that brings you satisfaction.

I mean think about it, you spend the majority of your life working. If you don't enjoy your job, then you're leading a miserable life. **On average, you spend 8 hours a day at work. That's 22 working days out of the month; 2,112 hours a year!** Wouldn't you rather spend all of that time working towards something you truly care about?

Mental Notes On How To Manifest Your Destiny!

At this point I'm sure I've got you convinced. You deserve the job of your dreams. In order to approach these opportunities and make them a reality, there are three components to keep in mind:

1. Display expectations for yourself, and the company

Check out resources such as LinkedIn to research the expectations for the job you are pitching for. Research the job descriptions for a grade or two above your skill set. See what goals you need to work towards and which skills you need to improve.

Explain the progression you would like to see in yourself, and how your progression will benefit the future of the company. Self-reflection is very important to employers, so be transparent about which skills you need to improve upon that can also improve the company.

2. Understand competitions the company is facing

In order to understand what the company needs, you need to know what they're competition is doing. Is it working for them? Could you advance those ideas and make them your own?

Show them that you know which issues they are facing, and suggest strategies to solve these issues. Offer your skills and explain how they will give them a new edge in this growing market.

3. Don't just tell them what you can do, show them.

Prepare a portfolio of your previous projects to show off your capabilities and experience. After explaining what you have done, tell them your plans for the future. What are you doing to enhance your skills? What could have been improved in previous projects?

If you show that you are actively improving your skill set, prospective employers can expect that your skills will improve their business plan.

So remember, don't wait for the perfect job. Create it.

Re-learn How to Learn in the Information Age

When you scroll through Facebook, you can see posts about simple stretches to relieve back pain, how to make a s'mores, and how to be single and happy. Or if you go on Youtube, you can find gurus talk about makeup tips, or Youtubers teach playing guitar.

But those stretching exercises, the way to make a s'mores, how to be happy being single, how to do a good makeup, and how to play guitar better are things that most people never master doing at the end.

Technology has brought a surplus of information to the world, but it hasn't made people smarter. The mere exposure to data doesn't make people better thinkers and learners.

The fact is, most people have never learned how to learn properly.

On average, people spend 50 minutes per day on Facebook alone.((New York Times: Facebook Has 50 Minutes of Your Time Each Day. It Wants More.)) Being exposed to information is not the same as internalizing and adapting the knowledge. Even during formal education, students acquire knowledge quickly to write papers and take exams; turning what they learn into wisdom that they can apply throughout their lives is uncommon.

The conventional systems of knowledge acquisition fail to make use of the brain's potential. ((Scientific American: What is the Memory Capacity of the Human Brain?)) **Unless we use that information, we're bound to forget it.**

Taking in Knowledge— Then and Now

How to apply knowledge is different today because it's easy to expose to a lot of information every day. Traditional learning styles often involved apprenticeship or immediate active application of skills.((The Atlantic: Why Germany Is So Much Better at Training Its Workers))

If you were trying to learn to ski before the Information Age, you'd likely start by finding an instructor. The experienced skier would help you understand the equipment and act as a guide while you learned the mechanics of the activity. You'd constantly work to apply what you learned by practicing on your own time, the bulk of your learning was done on the slopes. Eventually, you wouldn't need your instructor, and you'd consider yourself a competent and confident skier.

Today, when you decide that you want to learn to ski, you spend hours perusing the internet for every blog post and article about skiing. You watch videos of people skiing, research the best gear, and join a Facebook group for winter sports enthusiasts.You may feel like an expert in all things ski-related after you dig into these resources, but have you actually learned to ski? There's a big difference between reading about putting on skis and actually hitting the slopes.

Today, the quality of the knowledge is sacrificed for quantity.

There's an imbalance between the knowledge we take in and the information that we use. ((Huffpost: The Internet May Be Changing Your Brain in Ways You Never Imagined)) Human brain is working as quickly as it can to send data from the working memory to the long-term memory, but it can't retain everything.((National Bernstein Network Computational Neuroscience: How is Information Transferred Into Long-Term Memory))

The chase for more information is thrilling too. The desire to keep up sends most people scrolling through Facebook on a frequent basis. People are plagued by the fear of missing out (FOMO) to the detriment of authentic learning.((HuffPost: Social Media, FOMO, and the Perfect Storm for the Quarter-Life Crisis)) Most are up to date on sensational stories, and are sharing like mad on Facebook and WhatsApp, but convenient access to knowledge is no replacement for deep learning through effort and concentration. Only very little of the easily-accessed information have people really applied in their lives.

How to Realistically Absorb and Apply Information

While it'd be perfect to absorb and apply 100% of the information, it's not quite possible. Perhaps there are a few hyper-productive individuals who can achieve this level of success. But most of us aren't Albert Einstein, and we're pressed for time. We have to be pragmatic about how we approach information if we want it to stick.

If you want to hang onto information for the long-haul, you'll need to be selective about what you choose to absorb. Without a plan, getting information from the internet is like trying to eat the entire buffet in one sitting. Break the overabundance of resources into easily digestible pieces so that you can give the information time to become meaningful to you.

1. Get a brain filter — filter out information that won't improve you.

Scrolling through the internet is a passive form of knowledge acquisition. The amount of information that we can access is always going to be more than we can process. To filter the information you take in, focus on what you need to improve. What must you learn to be successful? Taking this simple step enables you to pass over unrelated and tangentially-related information.

As you continue to grow your knowledge and skills, you can update the parameters of your filter.

If you return to the skiing example, you establish your filter by deciding what you need to learn about skiing right now. Are you trying to figure out how to put on the skis properly? Do you know how to stop when you're heading down a slope? If you are working on the fundamentals, it won't be valuable to spend time learning about advanced tricks. After you're proficient in the basics, modify your filter so that you continue to grow your skills.

2. Take information into the real world — do what you've read to confirm your learning.

Knowledge isn't useful until you can apply it. If you are trying to learn a new skill, you'll have to do the things that you've read about in your research. Until you've made multiple attempts to master the ski-trick you saw on Youtube, you haven't internalized it. When you can land the trick without thinking or recall information without struggling, it is yours.

It isn't always easy to take information from the computer screen into the real world. There's a fair chance that you are going to fail the first time you attempt something.

When you are learning to ski, you are going to fall. You'll probably fail to execute a smooth turn, and even when you do succeed, you'll undoubtedly compare yourself to all the other skiers on the slope that day. Giving up when you fall or allowing your brain to spin a self-defeating narrative keeps you from learning. Making mistakes is a potent part of the learning process.((Teach Thought: 10 Ways to Honor Mistakes in the Learning Process))

Practice, get feedback; and practice, and get feedback.

Getting into the habit of applying what you've learned is excellent, but there is only so much that you can do on your own. You need the input of others to take your skills to the next level.

You can initiate a feedback loop by performing a self-assessment to take stock of where you are in the learning process, but if you want to make more growth, seek feedback from others.((Fast Company: Why You Hate Getting Feedback but Still Need More of It))

It is easy to stop at the self-assessment stage and convince yourself that you are doing everything well, but you don't know what you don't know. Insights from others can help you determine where you should focus your learning efforts next so that you are always improving.

When you start to build new skills, you may be able to process instructions in the moment, but if you don't continue to practice, you won't internalize the knowledge. You'll have to repeat your actions or process until it becomes second-nature.

For example, when you learn a new word, you have to go through the slow process of looking it up, repeating the definition, and using it in a sentence several times. If you don't use the word, you will forget it, but if you use it enough, it comes to mind with ease.

3. Stay alert to what to learn next — avoid wasting time on unnecessary information.

When you target your searches as opposed to mindlessly scrolling, you'll retain more information.

Take opportunities to reflect on what you have learned along the way. You'll not only feel better about your progress, but be able to make use of what you already know when you take on a different challenge.

To refer to our skiing example for a final time, imagine that you've mastered the basics of movement. You can turn smoothly and stop when you need to. What do you need to learn next? How will the things that you already know about skiing impact the way that you approach new techniques and challenges?

Knowledge Is Not Meant to Be Known, but to Be Applied

To know something deeply, you'll have to engage with it on a consistent basis while giving yourself plenty of opportunities for self-reflection and objective feedback. Knowledge is cumulative. The greatest minds and most skilled athletes of our time didn't become that way by scouring social media or reading books — they put in the time to make meaning of their the data that was relevant to their studies.

True learning is not always easy. You'll experience struggles as you tackle new challenges and wade through the ephemera of the Digital Age. If you can focus your efforts and make deliberate choices about your learning, you can navigate the abundance of resources to make meaningful gains in your life.

How to Program Your Mind to Kick the Bad Habit

As you're reading this, you may be checking your phone or Facebook, slouching in your chair, or snacking without thinking. Perhaps you're reading this right before bedtime even though you know that the light from your electronics can negatively impact your sleep pattern.((Live Science: How Blue LEDs Affect Sleep))

We are all guilty of some of these things from time to time.

The Love-Hate Relationship With Bad Habits

Having bad habits doesn't make someone a bad person— even if you are aware that your behavior could have a negative impact on your health or well-being. If you are having trouble making a change, you're likely telling yourself one of two things:

- I've been [insert your habit here] for such a long time, and it doesn't seem to be affecting my life that much. It would take too much effort to quit, and I don't think it's necessary.
- I've been doing this for so long that I don't know any other way to function. I don't think that I can quit.

Bad habits have become so ingrained in everyday behaviors that it is bound to be tough to change them. These routines are such a part of life that even knowing the potential negative impacts might not be enough to change them.((Medical Daily: How Habits Are Formed and Why They're So Hard to Change))

For example, a stressful phone call at work could be a trigger for you. The stress might make you want to eat an entire bag of chips. That bag of chips gave you some level of satisfaction. The reward is happening on a chemical and hormonal level in your body. Even though you know that snacking excessively is unhealthy, your body may crave junk food whenever you are under stress.((Harvard Health Publications: Why stress causes people to overeat)) Before you know it, for good or for ill, you've initiated the process of habit-formation.((NPR: Habits: How They Form and How to Break Them)) **Oftentimes, this version of autopilot is a form of escape.**

Maybe you smoke because you feel that it helps to relieve your stress. Perhaps you slouch chronically because you are fatigued, and it seems easier to slump over than sit up straight. Bad habits provide with some form of comfort which can make them tough to break.

Imagine I had two offers for you, the first offer was giving you 100 dollars today, and the second offer was giving you 1000 dollars but only 7 years later. Which offer would you take? Even though you know that you can get more money if you wait, you're likely to take the first offer because you don't like to delay the reward.

Instant gratification has always been the greatest enemy when it comes to breaking bad habits. Knowing something can have a negative effect is never enough to make someone quit. Bad habits exist because they are actually making people feel good.

How to Break up With Bad Habits

Here are three proven steps to get over bad habits once and for all.

1. Take your mind away.

After you've made up your mind to quit, and you've found your alternative, commit to quitting your bad habits by going mindless every time a bad habit trigger appears.((Bustle: 7 Tips On How To Break A Bad Habit And Replace It With A Good One)) Committing to change means that you can't make excuses and you can't give yourself any room to convince yourself why you can just skip it once. Don't think whether you should do the bad habit or not, just don't do it no matter what.

For example, if you want to eliminate your incessant slouching at work, you have to tell yourself that you aren't going to slouch while you're working no matter what. Just stick to sitting up straight, no excuses on why you can slouch for a while.

2. Be super aware whether you have done the bad habit every day.

Write down how things are going with your commitment.((HuffPost: 5 Unexpected Ways To Break A Bad Habit)) It's easy to lose track of progress if you don't make a note of your behaviors.

You are bound to slip up when you are turning over a new leaf. Writing down your behaviors might reveal patterns related to these moments of weakness. If you can spot the pattern, you may be able to disrupt it.

3. Have a strict reward and punishment system.

Reward yourself when you stick with your commitment. Maybe you will allow yourself to take a five-minute dance break or eat a cookie with your lunch in exchange for not mindlessly chomping on snacks at your desk. Your reward doesn't have to be costly, but it should be valuable to you. The only stipulation is that you can't reward your good behavior with the bad habit.

Designate a consequence for engaging in the negative habit. The consequence doesn't need to be emotionally damaging. It just needs to cause enough discomfort or inconvenience to make you think twice about falling into old patterns.

People have been doing this for decades with the "swear jar."((Lifehacker: Top Ten Ways To Break Bad Habits)) Every time they say a bad word, they have to sacrifice money to the jar. You could come up with your own version of the swear jar or find some other consequence that will motivate you to stay on the proper path. Maybe every day that you snack on candy at your desk, you have to take your friend out to a healthy lunch. Having to incur this extra cost and effort will keep you accountable.

Your system of rewards and consequences are transactions that can help you eliminate your bad habits and automate the good ones.

Train Yourself Like a Dog (for a Good Cause)

Ultimately, you'll want to train yourself to do the right things the way that Pavlov's dogs salivated automatically when they heard a bell ring.((Simply Psychology: Pavlov's Dogs)) The dogs salivated (their routine) without thinking because they had been classically conditioned to associate the sound of the bell ringing (a trigger) with food (their reward).

Don't let a fear of failure stand in your way. Even if you have been engaged in a bad habit for years, it is still possible to eliminate the unhealthy behavior. Know that it may not be easy at first, but eventually the good habit will become your natural response to the trigger. The commitment to break bad habits could lead you to a healthier and more successful future. The change can start today.

Remember More with the Second Brain

Your whole life depends on you being able to retrieve things from your memory.

I'm sure you know what I mean... "Where are my keys?" "What major tasks do I need to complete today?" "What time is that meeting I need to attend?"

Questions such as these bombard our minds daily. If you're able to recall the relevant information, you'll keep your life on track. However, if you fail to recall the information - your life will start to move in a confused and unproductive direction.

We'd all love to boost our memories, but often we go about it in the wrong way. It's not about how much information we can absorb into our minds, but how easily we can retrieve this information (which most people aren't good at).

Information Overload = Memory Failure

We live in an *information age*, where our minds are besieged 24/7 by facts, figures, news, drama and trends.

To maintain our standing among our peers, most of us strive in vain to keep up-to-date with everything from music to movies to politics.

It's a never-ending whirlpool of information. And if you try to remember all of this information - you're likely to find that your mind becomes so full that you begin to lose the ability to think clearly.

Information overload is a modern-day plague. And your memory is likely to be one of the plague's victims.

For example, when you were younger, you may have loved to sing along with your favorite songs. Sadly, as you've grown older, you've started to forget the words to the songs. The more you try to recall the words - the further from your mind they seem to be. It's frustrating, and has probably blighted a pastime that you used to love.

Could it be that over the years, you've tried to remember just too many songs? Perhaps.

As you'll see below, continually overloading your memory, can lead to recall issues and embarrassing social interactions.

It's on the Tip of My Tongue, But...

It can be distressing when the flow of our conversation is blocked by our inability to recall information. And this can be especially traumatic if it takes place during a formal work environment.

For instance, imagine that you're doing a presentation at work to some potential clients. You've created PowerPoint slides to guide you through your presentation, but the bulk of the message you're hoping to convey is held in the memory banks of your mind. You start your presentation positively, but after a few awkward questions from one of the clients, you notice your confidence slipping - and your recall ability falling too! Suddenly, facts and figures seem out of your grasp. You're stuttering, and rapidly losing the attention of the audience. To put it another way: you're presentation has gone down the pan!

Storing tons of information in your memory is worthless if you're unable to recall the parts you need - at the time you need them. Luckily, there's a way to give your physical memory some much-needed breathing space.

How to Let a 'Digital Brain' Take the Strain

Our physical brains can only offer us a limited amount of memory storage and recall abilities. These limits used to be sufficient, but as mentioned earlier, we now live in an *information age*, where our ability to absorb and recall information has been stretched beyond our normal capabilities.

What's the answer to this problem? Well, you could start by giving some of this storing and recalling work to a digital brain.

By this, I don't mean you should turn yourself into a cyborg. In fact, the only thing you'll be turning yourself into is a super-efficient and productive version of yourself!

I've called it a digital brain, but you'll know it simply as digital or online storage. And you're sure to recognize some of the tools:

- **Airtable**
- **Dropbox**
- **Evernote**
- **Google Drive**
- **Pocket**

The above software (and other similar ones) allows you to store, organize, and easily retrieve information. For example, Pocket lets you capture blogs, news and videos into a digital pocketbook. This is achieved through a one-click process. Once the content is within your pocketbook, you can retrieve and view it at any time. Clearly, this is far more efficient than trying to remember which stories you've seen earlier in the day - but hadn't had chance to read/watch.

Instead of trying to remember everything with your physical brain, begin moving over some of the information to your digital brain. Whichever tool (or tools) you decide to use, you'll immediately be able to take advantage of the following benefits:

- **You can store as much information as you wish.** (Free plans may offer only limited storage.)
- **You can easily organize and prioritize the stored information.**
- **The stored information is available in an instant, 24/7, 365 days a year.**

Compared to relying 100 percent on your physical brain, the addition of a digital brain will help you immensely. You'll be able to determine what to store, what not to store, and when to retrieve information. You'll also be able to use a digital brain to help you with your to-do lists and goal planning.

I personally use Google Drive for storing all my documents and images, and I use Todoist to help me manage my day-to-day tasks and workload. I've found using a digital brain to be liberating. Before, I used to stress over trying to remember everything - now my mind feels relaxed and free. I also have more mental energy for creative pursuits.

You may think that highly-productive people must be blessed with super-powered memories. For sure, some are, but most of these people are ordinary folks, with one difference... They have learned how to use a digital brain to help them store and retrieve information - and to organize their lives.

The Only Way to Remember Everything You Have Read

Our brains aren't made to remember everything that we encounter. Unless you're one of the rare individuals who has a photographic memory, it's likely that details about the content you consume fade quickly.

How often do you recall reading an article, but forgetting what it's about? Have you ever recognized a movie title but failed to remember the plot? If you frequently forget the things you've read and the movies you've watched, you aren't alone.

Think about what you had for lunch yesterday or what you did last weekend. Those memories are probably blurry because they aren't critical for your survival. Our brains have about 8 GB of capacity for immediate recall, and only the most essential information will make the cut. This can leave us with a blurred picture of nonessential information. Learn more about this in my other article: You've Been Using Your Brain Wrong: Human Brains Aren't Designed to Remember Things

The human brain is not designed to help you handle with massive amounts of data. We're bombarded with stimuli every day. If we processed and remembered everything, then it would probably make it difficult for us to function. Your brain sorts through all your experiences to weed out the significant and insignifcant things that we encounter.((LA Times: Human memory: What did you do last Sunday?))
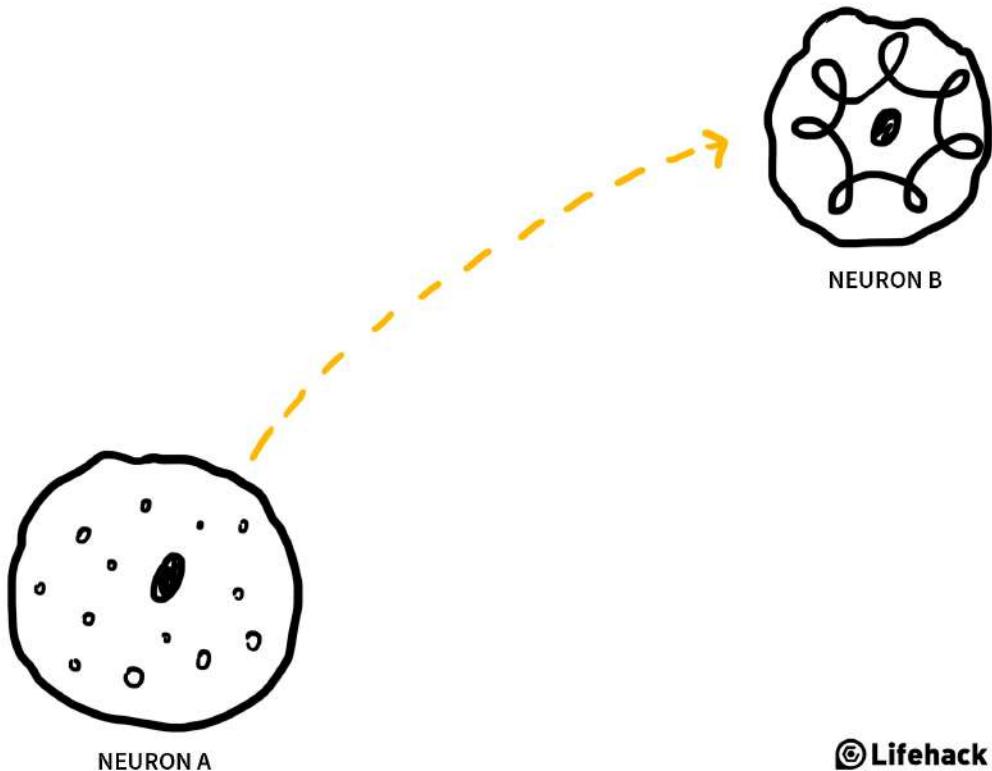
The first time you read something, finishing it is the only aim.

It doesn't matter how much you've been looking forward to seeing a movie or reading a book. Unless the content is linked to your survival, chances are that you'll forget what you've seen or read soon after viewing it.

Part of this is because your primary objective was to watch the film or read the book. When you've never seen something, your urge to finish the story is your main concern. After you've satisfied your desire, you probably won't remember what you've seen. Finishing the movie or book is not the same as remembering all the details.

Human beings store memories through a process called encoding. Our brain is better at encoding information when it can associate new information with pre-existing experiences. ((The Human Memory: Memory Encoding))
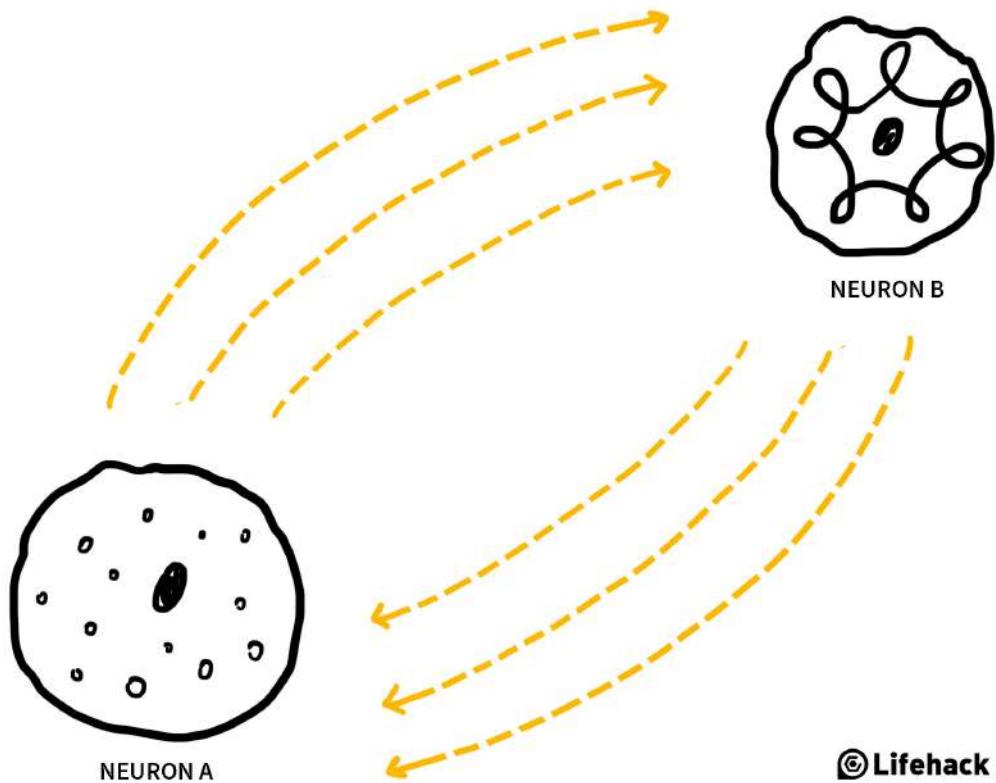
The first time we encounter information is akin to us passing strangers on the street. Your neurons process that you've encountered someone, and that's the end of it. There's no recognition, and after you leave the situation, you probably won't remember who you saw.

NEURON B

NEURON A

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Some people do remember what they see, though. Why?

You might feel frustrated when you can't recall what you've just seen, but it can be even more maddening when you run into someone who seems to have absorbed everything. This is the friend that recites details from the movies that you watched months ago. Long after the finer points of a text have slipped your mind, they're still talking about it. How do they do it?

These people don't have extraordinary memories. They simply take in the information actively. Since they're actively processing information, they are able to experience the book details or the movie scenes repeatedly in a short time. They revise and synthesize the information so that it becomes their own.

NEURON B

NEURON A

© Lifehack

It's like taking the same route every day and running into the same people. You begin to recognize people and observe more about them because they are already familiar to you. Likewise, your neurons can easily make new connections when they have been asked to revisit and analyze new information instead of passively observing it.

The key is to see, connect, and then repeat.

The more you actively engage with the content that you are consuming, the more readily you'll remember it. As your neurons revisit the same subject over and over, it's easier for them to make new connections.

Think of it like taking a walk through the woods. At first there is no path, but if you take the same route every day, eventually, you'll create a trail. You'll be able to move quickly and easily in a place where you used to have to move slowly. Your brain handles memory like this too. You want to build a well-worn path for your neurons.

Don't rely on your initial memory

The first time you go through something, you'll probably forget many details. You may find it difficult to absorb specifics because there's too much new information. When you watch movies or read books, you may find yourself obsessed with what will happen next. Your goal is just to get to the end.

It's helpful to revisit the content several times. You may find that since you already know what happens, you'll be able to appreciate the details.

Replaying or rereading isn't enough

You can look at the same piece of information over and over, but it doesn't mean that it will stay in your head. Rote memorization (memorizing by repetition) doesn't allow you to make meaningful connections with what you're seeing.((Oxford Learning: The Difference Between Rote Learning and Meaningful Learning))

To remember something, you need to apply it. Instead of passively taking in information or actively trying to memorize it by rote, it's important to make connections. If you can apply what you've learned, get feedback, and re-apply a concept with feedback, it's much more likely to stick.

For example, reading a recipe alone won't help you learn to cook. Cooking a meal and having the combined feedback of your taste-buds and the comments of others will stand out in your mind. Watching someone do an exercise never has the same impact as doing it yourself. A framework is all but useless unless you apply it.

When you apply a concept or practice to your life, it becomes easier to internalize the information. Think about the first time you had to travel to work versus now. At first, you had to think about each step on the route, but now, you don't even have to think about it. It is the combination of repetition and application that solidifies neuron connections.

Have a question at the back of your mind before you read/watch it

When you pick up a book or sit down to watch a movie, have a purpose in mind. If you don't, your default mode will simply be to get to the end of the book or film. Have a question that you'd like to answer before you begin.

For example, reading *The Power of Habit* without a purpose will not be very helpful. It will seem useless to anyone who isn't ready to build a habit no matter how good the book is. On the other hand, if you think of a bad habit that you'd like to quit before you start reading, you can instantly connect what you're reading with your own life.

When you spot related chapters or ideas in books, find ways to connect them. Highlight them, write notes, or clip the sections that are related. Taking notes by hand is an especially valuable way to help you remember important concepts.((PBS: NovaNext:For More Effective Studying, Take Notes With Pen and Paper))

People who watch lots of movies or read lots of books, but can't remember them, waste a lot of time. They haven't taken in any information that will actually help them. To avoid forgetting everything you see, apply it immediately after you see it, and revisit the concepts often.

Have a mind like a steel trap

Chances are that by tomorrow you will forget what you've read in this article unless you save it, highlight it, and make a point of relating it to your life. Bookmark this and come back to it so that you can remember what you need to do to have better recall on the media you consume.

Watching movies and reading mindlessly is a a waste of time. Make the most of everything that you see and read by finding ways to engage with the content. Think of what you'll be missing if you allow these learning opportunities to pass you by.

Stop Offensive Criticism From Reaching You

Have you ever asked someone for their opinion about something and received a response that was overly critical, vague, slightly hurtful or down right rude? You ask something like, "*How do I look?*" And you are met with this reply: "*the shoes are ok, but that dress makes you look homely and you really should wear make up.*"

What do you do with that response? Do you accept the fact that the shoes are okay and ignore the rest? Should you be hurt or offended?

The fact of the matter is accepting feedback and constructive criticism is tough. Our first inclination is to adopt a defensive posture and either deflect, explain or make excuses for the critical area. Criticism and feedback that are constructive and accurate are necessary evils tied to growth and success. You have to learn how to handle it without lashing out or becoming disillusioned.

Asking the right questions brings the right criticism.

One of the most efficient ways to take some of the sting out of criticism and to ensure it truly is constructive in nature is to ask the right questions. If you ask vague and open-ended questions, be prepared for vague responses that miss the mark. Asking "how do I look," is an open invitation for abuse. That question leaves nothing--regarding your appearance--out of bounds. However, asking "does the color and style of these shoes work with this outfit," is a much more precise and targeted question. And you are more likely to get a very targeted and precise answer.

Asking the right questions, tells the critiquer what specifically to focus on. When you request feedback--of any kind--you invite and empower the responder to look for and point out your flaws. The more open-ended and vague the request, the more power you give them. Asking targeted questions not only assists you in getting the appropriate information you need, it also provides the person providing the feedback a clear area of focus. All of their attention is directed to one specific area and this helps to eliminate the tendency people have to look for something to criticize.

Below are a few ways to help you get accurate and targeted feedback:

1. Make your questions as specific as possible.

Ask about specific situations — for example, what could you have done differently in a particular meeting or situation. Avoid the generic "so, how am I doing," questions and ask about specific aspects of your performance, a particular project or interaction. Tailor your questions to suit the type of feedback you need. Ask both specific and open-ended questions.

2. Ask clarifying questions.

When the critiquer is providing you with feedback, ask questions to ensure you clearly understand what he or she is telling you. Be careful of your tone and body language during this part of the process. You don't want to appear defensive. The questions should be designed to help you understand the message and it should not appear that you are questioning the individual. Ask for specific examples or instances so that you have a point of reference for the criticism. And finally, when appropriate, solicit suggestions on how you can correct the behavior.

3. Listen and don't defend.

As humans, we've been conditioned to respond not to understand. As soon as we hear a portion of what someone is saying and believe we know where they are headed, we quit listening and begin constructing our response. This is especially true when we hear negative criticism about ourselves. However, if you can learn to take a deep breath and focus on listening to ensure you understand what is being said, you can turn negative criticism into a positive change that moves you forward.

Listening intently, will also help you better decipher between true criticism and criticism that is framed in emotion. Emotions change and criticism birth from emotion, most likely will change as well. Learning to decipher between the two can save you a lot of unnecessary heartache.

4. Consider who you ask.

Before you solicit feedback, consider who you are asking. Is it a friend who is going to tell you what you want to hear? Does this person enjoy having power over you? Does he or she have anything to gain from your interaction? Is this person qualified to provide you accurate feedback? Do you respect the person? Is this person a person of consequence-- someone you respect, admire and value in the area in which you are seeking feedback?

Before accepting and internalizing feedback--positive or negative--always consider the source. Some feedback isn't worth your time or attention.

5. Deconstruct the feedback.

Once you've requested, heard and clarified the feedback, then you can process it. Do you have a clear picture of what the issue is? Is this something that you need to change? Is this an isolated incident with mitigating circumstances? What is the context and sub-context of this issue. Is this something you can change? Do you have a plan to address this issue if it needs to be addressed?

If you can't answer these questions, you may need to go back and ask more clarifying questions or seek a bit more insight.

6. Evaluate the feedback.

The final step in soliciting and accepting life-changing feedback is a process of evaluation which you must do for yourself. You must answer the question--is this something I should accept, internalize and work on? Do you agree with all or some of what you've heard? You make this decision after you've considered the source and all the surrounding circumstances. If you've correctly completed the other five steps, the answer will be obvious. You'll know if the feedback is valuable or not--even if you don't like it.

Getting useful feedback is one of the fastest routes to growth and improved performance. It's not always an accurate reflection of **who you are** — but it is an accurate reflection of **how you're perceived.** Knowing how you're perceived is critically important if you want to increase your influence as a leader, or move up within your organization. Hearing the truth can be tough, however, not hearing it could be detrimental.

Don't Focus on Improving Your Faults

Watch enough nature documentaries, and you're bound to witness an apex predator singling out the sickest and the weakest prey. People seem to have a subconscious fascination with homing in on weaknesses in ourselves and others. Just like how we watch a lion attacks the slowest antelope, we sometimes watch as our self-doubt and negativity rip our dreams apart. We truly are our worst critics.

To be successful, you must resist the urge to focus on deficits and start capitalizing on your strengths.

Constructive feedback and a critical eye are great, but many of us spend too much time beating ourselves up over our faults. We need a paradigm shift. Concerning ourselves only with weaknesses breeds more weakness. Compulsive fault-finding is not an efficient self-improvement strategy.

Instead of spending time criticizing yourself, try to take an objective approach to understanding your personal journey. Performing a SWOT Analysis is a great way to retrain the way you think about yourself.((MindTools: Personal SWOT Analysis: Making the Most of Your Talents and Opportunities))

- **S - Strengths** . List areas in which you excel. What types of work do you find most rewarding, and what training do you have? If you are not sure about this, think about the types of things that others often ask you to do.
- **W - Weaknesses** . What types of work do you dread doing? Are there things that you consistently avoid or put off until the last minute? Take note of training and skill deficiencies that you may have.
- **O - Opportunitie** s. Name specific ways that you can work to grow. Do you have access to professional help? Can you take courses or get training to make your strengths stand out and overcome your weaknesses?
- **T - Threats** . Insecurities, physical and mental health, and external forces such as cash flow can threaten your ability to focus and become the best version of yourself.

We all need to take stock of where we are in order to achieve success. Personal SWOT analysis can help us do that without becoming so bogged down in our weaknesses that we forget about all the great things we can do. Below is an example of how a personal SWOT analysis might look for an individual trying to land freelance marketing jobs.

Personal SWOT ANALYSIS

S Strengths

- I was a dual major in marketing and design.
- I am passionate about marketing.
- I enjoy creating the art for ad campaigns.
- I am a driven self-starter.
- I enjoy receiving constructive feedback.

W Weaknesses

- I didn't get as much experience as I should have gotten in college.
- I have trouble meeting deadlines.
- My organizational and time-management skills are poor.
- I don't understand how to use social media.

O Opportunities

- I have a colleague who is willing to teach me about Facebook, Twitter, etc.
- I found a posting for a job that matches my skill sets perfectly.
- There's a company willing to offer support to freelancers. If I do well in the trial period, I can work for them on retainer.
- I can become more organized through online resources and apps.

T Threats

- I am living paycheck to paycheck. Money threatens my ability to pursue my dreams.
- I have a health condition that causes me to miss time at work.
- The market is competitive.

By identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, our imaginary marketer can apply this knowledge to self-improvement and focus on his or her assets while maintaining realistic expectations. Notice that this person's opportunities didn't only include possible solutions to weaknesses, but also capitalized on strengths.

Become an asset-based thinker to maximize your strengths.

Develop a growth mindset and recognize that successful people are always striving for improvement.((Inc.com:7 Scientifically Proven Ways to Achieve Better Success in Life)) You do have to consider weaknesses, but in some cases, you might be able to delegate tasks that aren't your strong suit to other people. For example, our freelance marketer who is a whiz at design but awful with social media could learn to navigate various social media platforms. He or she could also outsource the social media work to another person and focus solely on design.

If you take a myopic approach to your life and focus only on weakness, you will only grow in the areas where you have identified a problem. When too much of your focus goes toward problems, you cripple your ability to fully make use of your strengths.

For example, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series has delighted fans from many countries around the world. J.K. Rowling, while brilliant, doesn't speak all 68 languages into which her work has been translated.((Scholastic: Meet author J.K. Rowling)) It wouldn't be a good use of her time to try to learn all those languages either. It is much more efficient for her to focus on the craft of writing and outsource the translations to many different translators.

Of course, being multi-lingual is an excellent skill, and you shouldn't be afraid to learn new things. It's just that sometimes that cost of the skill you need to learn is too high to make it beneficial for you to learn it. Let someone else use their strengths in concert with your own so that you can both be happier and more productive.

Being successful is about working smarter and remembering these 5 things:

1. Identify the things that you want to achieve.

Set goals to define a path for yourself.((Entrepreneur: 21 Ways to Achieve Wealth and Success))

You have always had an entrepreneurial spirit. You decide that you would like to run your own business and break away from your 9 to 5 job in the next year.

2. Figure out how your strengths can help you reach your goals.

Those strengths that you defined with your SWOT analysis can serve as a road map for your future.

Perhaps you are a gifted metalworker. You do some research and decide that you should go into business making art from metal. You decide that in the next six months you'd like to pull together the resources to leave your job and be a blacksmith full-time.

3. Focus on the skills that you need grow to develop your strengths.

Instead of stressing out about the things you don't do well, put most of your energy into refining your unique talents.((Melyssa Griffin: How to Find Balance Between Self-Improvement vs. Self-acceptance))

Starting your own metalworking business is going to require you to learn some new things. You'll have to figure out where you can get materials to do this sort of work, and you'll need to learn how to build up a client base. In addition to practicing your metalworking, you'll have to spend some time networking. You have to do all of these things so that can afford to grow your metalworking skills.

4. You may encounter obstacles along the way, and that's when you know which weaknesses to work on first.

Weaknesses that interfere with your ability to achieve your goals need to be tackled head-on. You might do this through acquiring new skill sets or finding a colleague with strengths in areas that challenge you.((Fast Company: 5 Ways to Discover and Develop Your Unique Strengths))

Imagine that your business is doing so well that you have to file quarterly taxes. You balk at this because you don't understand the tax code. Rather than waste time on taxes that you could spend crafting beautiful sculptures with your specialized skills, you hire a CPA. The CPA has a different set of specialized skills and knows how to make sure you comply with tax laws and get the maximum number of deductions.

5. Always focus on enhancing your strengths.

There are things that you can do better than anyone else. If you can find out what those things are, you can spend time working to make your best even better.((Life Optimizer: 12 Essential Lessons to Maximize Your Personal Strengths))

You are already excellent at working with one kind of metal. To enhance your strengths, you might practice with different materials or find a mentor who can teach you new techniques. In this case, not knowing how to work with certain types of metal isn't really a weakness - it's just untapped potential.

Don't let yourself drown in deficiencies.

When you dwell on the negative, you don't give yourself a chance to shine. By becoming an asset-based thinker and appreciating your strengths, you can find success more easily. Instead of going down rabbit-holes to take on work that requires a specialist or beating yourself up over unchangeable aspects of your character, focus on maximizing your talents. Not only will you be more successful, but you'll be a lot happier too.

Control Your Mind, Set the Right Goal

Many people believe that IQ or intelligence is the determining factor for success. However, studies prove that intellect has very little to do with it.

Researchers conducted a 30-year study ((Linkedin: What Predicts Success? It's Not Your IQ)) on 1000 children and found that **cognitive control is a more reliable predictor of success than IQ**. Meaning, the ability to delay gratification and to remain goal oriented was the ultimate key to their success.

The implication? Successful people aren't smarter; they're more adept at setting and achieving their goals.

What's the secret to affective goal setting you ask? Read on…

The ultimate guide to goal setting

Below are four simple steps for setting realistic goals:

Step 1. Set long-term goals FIRST

Creating a long wish list of things you would love to do is easy. We write down things like:

- Visit Europe.
- Learn to scuba dive
- Find a new job

It is human nature to dream big, and set unrealistic goals we'll probably never achieve. As long as we've jotted a list of possibilities, we feel accomplished.

Wishes are not goals. Goals without a plan are merely dreams. When we go with the flow and set our sights on nothing in particular, that's exactly what we'll achieve. Nothing. Successful people start by setting long-term goals (at least five years out) first. Their goals are lofty but they begin systematical moving toward them—step-by-step.

Setting long-term goals forces you to look down the road and plan for the future. Chasing goals keeps us motivated, especially in the face of the mundane, tedious, but necessary everyday tasks.

Long-term goals are concrete and dreams are wispy abstracts. There is a notable difference between saying: "Someday I will be an authority in brain research and possibly find a cure for a dreaded disease" and "By 2020 I will have my Master's Degree in Neurologic Surgery from Johns Hopkins University and will find a job in brain research." The first statement is a dream that has no firm basis in reality. The second statement is a long-term goal derived from the dream of becoming a brain-research expert, but it also includes a clear and tangible path on how to get there.

Step 2. Break large goals into smaller ones

While long-term goals provide us with focus and direction, short-term goals give us momentum.

After setting long-term goals, setting smaller, short-term goals is critical because they provide you with quick wins and allow you to experience many "little successes" on your way to the big success.

Let's pretend that your long-term goal is to run a chain of bed and breakfasts (B&B's) on a beach–somewhere.

First, you need to break it down into a slightly smaller goal like opening your first B&B in a specific location or area within five years.

Then break it down further from there. You could start by working at a local B&B and shadowing the owner for six months in order to learn the business. Followed by other smaller steps which build upon one another and ultimately end in you opening your first B&B in Ocala, FL within the five-year period.

If you don't break down the large goal and make a plan, you can quickly become overwhelmed and discouraged. The dream will remain just a dream—unrealized, and slowly die.

Step 3. Set SMART goals

When setting goals (long or short), use the SMART framework((Mind Tools: Smart Goals)). This means that goals should be:

Specific

You goal should be clearly stated in specific terms. This allows you to better plan and prioritize your time and resources. It also helps you remain focused and driven.

For example, the goal: 'I want to be famous' is not specific. A specific goal would be 'I want to be a well-known YouTuber. By identifying the platform, you now have direction. You can start by learning the videography skills you will need, such as video editing, which will help keep you focused and moving toward your goal.

Measurable

You should also specifically quantify your goal. Use numbers instead of empty or meaningless adjectives. For example, if you want to be a well-known YouTuber, setting a goal of gaining one million subscribers is measurable versus saying "a lot" of subscribers. This enables you to see your progress at any time and gauge where you are in the process. You will know when you need to adapt your processes and better determine which ones are actually working. Having a concrete reminder of how far you've come pushes you to keep moving forward.

Attainable (achievable)

The objective of setting a goal is to make a plan, work and actually achieve that goal. You can't do this if your goal is impossible to accomplish. An attainable or achievable goal should be realistic and should match your abilities and resources. If it involves a myriad of things that are out of your control, then it may not be achievable for you.

Let's revisit our goal of being a well-known You Tuber with one million subbies. Let's say you've never made a video—recorded, edited or produced one. The first step in your process is determining whether you have the time, energy and resources to acquire the necessary skills to create exceptional content. If this seems unrealistic to you then your goal —the way it is stated, may not be achievable.

Relevant (realistic, reasonable)

A relevant goal matters to you and is reasonable. It should reside in the realm of reality and should complement other aspects of your life. If you have to make tremendous amounts of continuous sacrifices, you may need to ask yourself, "is it worth it?" You should strive to have a balanced effort-reward ratio.

If gaining one million subscribers on YouTube requires you to spend 10 hours every day editing videos, you are probably going to have problems paying bills, maintaining relationships and getting enough sleep. If the sacrifices are unrealistic and the cost is too steep, then your goal is not reasonable.

Time-based (timely, track-able)

A time-based goal has a specific deadline. You should also plan milestones along the way and set timelines to reach them.

On your way to one million You Tube subscribers, you could set a three-month milestone of 300,000 subscribers. This helps you track and adjust your progress while working towards your goal.

Step 4. Re-evaluate your long-term goal periodically (at least twice a year)

Success is a dynamic process that requires constant readjustments and recalculations.

Re-evaluate your goals often (at least twice a year) to ensure that your goals fit the SMART framework and to ensure you are still on target ((Personal Growth: The Most Powerful Questions That Shaped My 20s (So Far))).

Your goals dictate your actions and set your course. They provide you with a sense of purpose. Adjust your plan and processes when necessary but always maintain a laser-like focus on your goal and refuse to settle ((Oliver Emberton: If you want to follow your dreams, you have to say no to all the alternatives)). Interruptions and hiccups to the plan will occur, but you must push past them and keep moving toward the prize.

…And before you know it, you will have converted your dream into reality.

The Top 10% Practice Deliberately

90% of people look for instant formulae to success, not realizing that when it comes to the path of success, there are no shortcuts. Hard work, a dedicated perseverance towards a goal and regular skill practice is what would get you there. You may be intensely talented but to actually reach the peaks, you need to hone that talent by sheer practice, and by **deliberate practice**.

Be you a sports fan or golf aficionado or not, you must have heard of Ben Hogan's impeccable record and his surgeon-like precision of a golf swing, and he did this by breaking down the game of gold into small parts – each of which he analyzed and repeatedly practiced till he achieved ultimate mastery. That is the art of deliberate practice.

> As Ben Hogan so rightly remarked, "As you walk down the fairway of life you must smell the roses, for you only get to play one round." We all must ensure we make it a good round…

Deliberate Practice: Identify Your Weaknesses First

The key to deliberate practice is simple and follows the same pattern, till the time success is reached. **The first step is to break the overall process down into parts, the second is to identify your weaknesses, the third is to test new strategies** for each section, and finally the fourth step is to integrate your learning into the overall process. The fifth step is to repeat! ((Mel Robbins : 5 Deliberate Steps To Master A Skill))

Most people look for immediate results based on nothing more than the human process of natural growth. But for our growth to be deliberate, our practice has to be equally deliberate too! So the key to how to be successful, is a mastering of your skill set.

Think about it this way, if you ever started out by following your heart, and learning a new skill, say dancing – were you able to master it by merely assuming you would? No, right? You'd have to practice your moves, consult a teacher, get to know and then work on correcting your mistakes in theory as well as in practice and then probably do it all over again till you are able to master the moves, the posture, the expression and finally, the body language!

How Deliberate Practice Leads to Great Achievements

Remember that deliberate practice is not putting in some extra time at work or working 60-80 hours weeks. Deliberate practice is when you focus on just one aspect of your work and then start to improve upon that – deliberately and repeatedly, no matter how much time it takes, and that is the most important aspect to how to be successful. Here are a few examples of deliberate practice that famous, and successful people have employed to make themselves better at what they do.

Mozart's 10 Years of Silence

John Hayes, a cognitive psychology professor at Carnegie Mellon University, wanted to know that how much practice it took, in terms of time, before you could produce a masterpiece. So he studied over 500 music pieces composed by 76 different composers and discovered that it took all at least ten years of solid practice before they were able to churn out a masterpiece in music – including Mozart. ((James Clear: Deliberate Practice))

Kobe Bryant's 800 Shoots

A story pretty well known in sports circle is that of Kobe Bryant's deliberate practice. As team trainer Robert recalls it after seeing it firsthand, "Kobe Bryant started his conditioning work around 4:30 am, continued to run and sprint until 6 am, lifted weights from 6 am to 7 am, and finally proceeded to make 800 jump shots between 7 am and 11 am. And then Team USA had practice!" For Kobe, his goal was 800 baskets, the time spent doing it was immaterial… For Kobe, his route to how to be successful was simple - to keep practicing.

A Decade of Practice Under The Masterchef

Jiro Ono is a chef and the owner of an award-winning sushi restaurant in Tokyo and his technique has been the subject of a documentary too. Jiro is no ordinary chef for he has dedicated his life to perfecting the art of making sushi. And he expects the same of his apprentices too if they want to work with him. In fact, each apprentice must master one tiny part of the sushi-making process at a time like how to wring a towel, how to use a knife, how to cut the fish! So much so that one apprentice trained under Jiro for ten years before being allowed to cook the eggs! ((A Learning A Day: Some Reflections On Jiro Dreams Of Sushi))

> As a professor of psychology at The Florida State University Anders Ericsson puts it, "the sole reason you aren't a virtuoso violinist, or an Olympic athlete, or another kind of world-class performer, is that you haven't engaged in a process called "deliberate practice"."

Tips To Keep In Mind For Deliberate Practice

Stay Just A Little Above Your Abilities

Think about it this way, you may know how to write a good page or an essay. To go a little above and beyond your current skills, try writing a short story or even a long-from article. Don't try to go from 0 to 100 in 60 seconds – deliberate practice is not a race – it's a journey that makes you reach your goal, the perfectionist's way.

Stay Goal Oriented

Before you try to get better at something, you have to know what it is that you are trying to do. One good way to watch a master or an expert at work – then you have a goal in mind that this is the level of expertise you too want to reach.

Break It Down

Rome, as they say, wasn't built in a day – and neither will your mastery in a skill. Whenever you attempt something new or even try to get better at what you already "know" – break it down into smaller parts. Attempt it part by part and master the basics before you attempt the more convoluted parts.

Find A Good Teacher

We cannot be objective about ourselves so if we want to improve ourselves, we need a teacher, guide or friend who can point out our flaws, or missing gaps so that we can improve everywhere we lack. Get someone, be it your teacher or mentor to keep giving you feedback and remember to take criticism constructively. This is very important in you search in how to be successful.

Remember that if you truly want to better yourself and reach 100% proficiency in something, you have to keep trying and keep practicing without bothering about the time or the effort spent. And you have to be patient and persevering about it if you do want to rise above the average and truly master what you so desire to!

Why Bother Learning New Stuff?
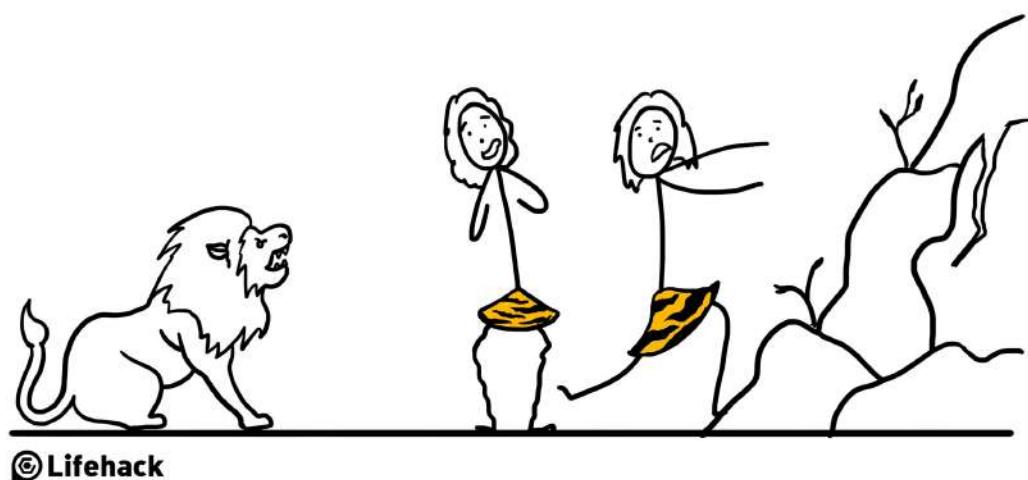
A person might have a great job, a nice house, and a great group of friends. They might feel they have everything they need, and so, they just settle, stop moving and pushing themselves. After all, their life seems to be going fine. You might have seen this with friends or acquaintances.

This is fine for a time; but the problem is, while a person stops moving or stops pushing themselves, the world keeps spinning. Time moves forward. Staying in the same place and not seeking self-improvement has the exact same effect as moving backwards.
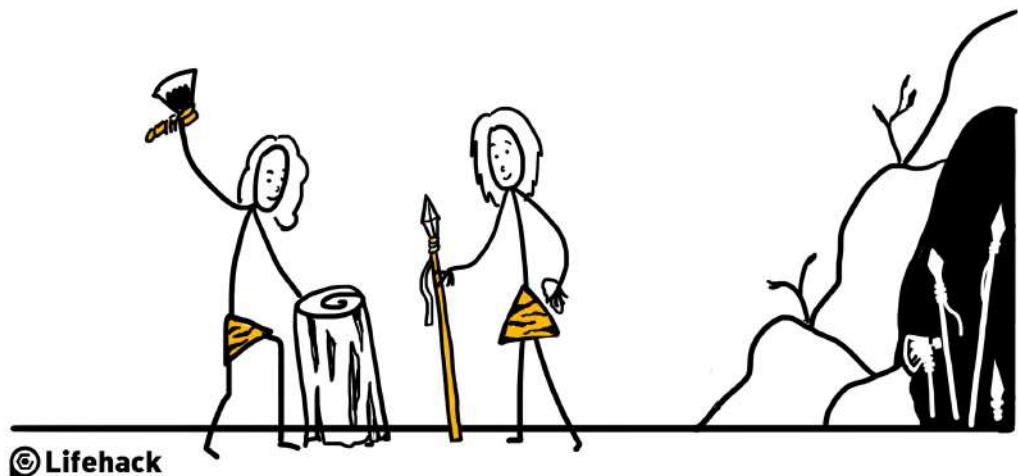
We are living in a period of technological and social advancement never before seen. Technology has moved and developed more over the past one hundred years, than it had in the previous thousand. With this speed of advancement, it is easy to fall behind. Even if a person's life seems to be going well now, and they don't seek improvement, several years down the line, they may find that their lack of advancement, the lack of development in important skills may cause big problems in their lives.

From Evolving to Settling

Human beings, homo sapiens have been on this planet for roughly one million years. At the beginning, humans had nothing to protect themselves in order to survive in the world.

So humans started to invent basic tools and formed basic languages in order to survive.

After some time, humans were satisfied with the things they developed because that was enough for basic survival. They could simply stop learning and creating new stuff.

It was okay to stop learning new stuff in order to survive until the 19th century, where the rate of technological advancement increased at a rapid pace. In just over sixty years, we went from the first flight by the Wright Brothers to men walking on the moon.

A few years later, with the widespread popularity of personal computers, the rate of human progress exploded. This is of course, an over simplification. But think about it, for the first time in history, not seeking self improvement, not moving forward with the rate of human progress, can be extremely dangerous. It's perfectly possible for someone to fall behind the rate of technological and human progress.

This isn't just a vague possibility either. In the UK, it has been estimated that one in five is under threat of being automatized.((The Guardian: Automation will affect one in five jobs across the UK, says study)) A person today who is comfortable in their job may find themselves replaced by a machine tomorrow. Many, many people might soon find themselves out of a job.

Even outside of the job market, technology has changed our lives in countless ways. The average, most basic smartphone is a camera, a diary, a computer, a gaming device, a store, a library, a web browser, a clock, a telephone, a TV...and can be far more with extra apps.

Not long at all ago, each of these things would have been a separate (and potentially very expensive) device, some would be impossible to carry around with you. It's easy to take for granted. But imagine if you never got a smartphone and was happy with what you had before. You'd have missed out on a great deal of convenience.

How to Stay Ahead

Ultimately, no matter how hard you try, it's impossible to predict how things will change over the next few years. We don't know what skills will or won't be needed. Nor do we know how our lives may change over the next few years. Something as simple as a new piece of technology can have an incredible impact on our lives (just think about the smartphone example from before). Because of this, you need to be ready to adapt and not fall into the trap of brief contentment.

Keep testing what you know

We all know how important it is to learn new skills, but again, it is easy to become quickly content with what you have, and with it, stop seeking improvement. This is illogical. If you stop trying to improve your skills, you'll find that your skill level doesn't stay on the same level, but instead decreases. In addition, the market for that skill is ever changing.

It's like when you test a tool or device you have, to examine its functionality. Is it wind-proof or water-proof? There is no point keeping a tool that can't do its job after all.

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It can be useful to pick one of your skills or an area of your life, then critically evaluate it. Ask yourself, how useful is it going to remain? How is it going to adapt or change to changing circumstances?

Lets relate this example to writing skill. The standards and styles expected of a writer are constantly changing. The internet has had a big impact on the way people read and interact with a piece of text. A writer today needs to be aware of this. Were a writer to stop paying attention to the changing marketplace, and the things expected of them, then they'll be less useful as a writer.

Ditch the outdated and equip with the better

After reviewing your skills and knowledge, you'll be able to decide which should be ditched and which should be improved. It's like throwing away old tools and devices that don't work or are no longer useful, and replacing them with new, better ones.

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A careful evaluation of things in your life and your skills can be extremely useful. With it, you'll be better able to see what might need changing or adapting, and what might be worth forgetting about.

So although it is impossible to predict exactly how the world will change, with consideration of your skills and a desire to adapt, you'll be able to find that you're able to stay ahead of a changing world.

I know it can be easy to become content, at the same time, pushing yourself and seeking change can be tough. But ultimately, this is something that can't be sustained.

Taking Classes Isn't Learning

What is learning, really? At the heart of it, do you approach learning something as truly consuming it, letting it ruminate and understanding it before applying what you know? Or do you simply memorize information that's being fed to you and consider that "knowledge"? If it's the latter, you may be using learning as an excuse to avoid putting in effort.

I know I have been guilty of simply memorizing information for an exam or paper and realizing I couldn't recall any of the facts afterward. In school I never saw this as a problem. After all, I was acing tests! But now in my adult life, I realize there are certain things I truly *learned,* as I have retained them all these years. But there are plenty of things I remember being taught but have no recollection of beyond that.

Attending lessons doesn't equal learning

Have you ever thought about how bizarre it is that we wake up five days a week and go to a building filled with desks, only to sit there counting down the minutes until the bell rings and we go home to do homework before starting it all over again the next day? If you feel like you aren't actually learning anything, this can seem like a huge waste of mind-numbing time.

You've probably heard people say they learn best by doing. I know I do. But what if we *all* do? Think about it: you could watch someone build a car all day long on Youtube, but if you were then given all the parts, would you truly know how to put it together it? You would know how it should look in the end, and you may even have a general idea of where things belong. But the odds of you putting together a working car just from seeing someone do it are slim. Until you apply the knowledge you're witnessing to your life, you haven't truly learned it; you've just seen it.

Knowledge is more accurately 30% consumption and 70% creation

First things first, knowledge does not equal 100% consumption. You cannot simply read about something all day and call yourself an expert. It takes time and application. Think of consuming knowledge the same way you consume healthy foods on a new diet. Eating nothing but raw veggies and lean protein for one full day will not instantly transform your

health or body. But doing it for a long time and making it a part of your life will lead to the results you want. Just like learning something, applying it to your life, working with it and adjusting what you really know will give you true knowledge over time, too.

Knowledge is more accurately 30% consumption and 70% creation. When you learn *about* something, you're consuming it and allowing some ideas to take shape in your mind. When you are learning to *do* something, you're using motor skills and memory to truly understand concepts and grasp facts. That's when knowledge becomes real and powerful.

You learn the most by failing

It's never fun to fail at something. In fact, in certain scenarios it can be embarrassing and upsetting. But with every failure comes a lesson. If you can use that lesson in your next attempt, you may still fail, but you'll be closer to getting it right. I remember when I was taking Spanish in High School and later French in College. Both languages required dedication and study, but I didn't figure out how to communicate in either of them by simply reading about what words translated to what and hearing someone tell me about conjugation.

I learned through trying to speak and occasionally messing up. In fact, I was on a study abroad trip in Ireland with an exchange student from France. He was incredibly handsome and I was the only one who could speak any French. Of course I seized the opportunity and would strike up a conversation at every opportunity. One morning, I tried to tell him I liked his sweater (le pull) but instead told him I liked his chicken (poulet)!! Thankfully he found it hilarious and not absurd, but I was mortified! But you can bet I never forgot the word after that. It took failure (and humiliation in my case) for me to actually *learn* the word rather than assume I knew it.

Stop using learning as a method of procrastination

When you accept sitting in a desk and hearing about something as the equivalent to knowledge you're cheating yourself out of success. You're procrastinating by sitting there and pretending you're an expert simply because you wrote a paper about something.

In order to truly be successful and master a subject or idea, you will still have to research and study. The idea is to truly implement the things you're learning - even through something as simple as having a conversation about it with someone - in your every day life.

My friends and family all know I am a wealth of random facts and "worthless information," but it's because I heard things that sparked my interest, researched them, told people about the things I had learned and applied them to my life when/if possible. I'm sure I would be great at math if I had a passion or career that required me to excel at it. I'd be a phenomenal scientist if I had ever truly cared about the experiments we did in my chem class. But I didn't put forth the effort. Instead, I watched, I listened and I forgot.

So think about your daily life and your career or aspirations. What could you be doing differently that would help you apply the things you're learning about in order to truly know them? What areas of study do you have difficulty in? Are these the subjects you don't care about and often cram for the night before an exam? Take that into consideration and realize what that could be a sign of.

The Relationship Between Decision Fatigue and Bad Decisions

When determining a court ruling, there are many factors that contribute to their final verdict. You probably assume that the judge's decision is influenced solely by the nature of the crime committed or the particular laws that were broken. While this is completely valid, there is an even greater influential factor that dictates the judge's decision: the time of day.

In 2012 a research team from Columbia University ((PNAS: Extraneous factors in judicial decisions)) examined 1,112 court rulings set in place by a Parole Board Judge over a 10 month period. The judge would have to determine whether the individuals in question would be released from prison on parole, or a change in the parole terms.

While the facts of the case often take precedence in decision making, the judges mental state had an alarming influence on their verdict.

As the day goes on, the chance of a favorable ruling drops
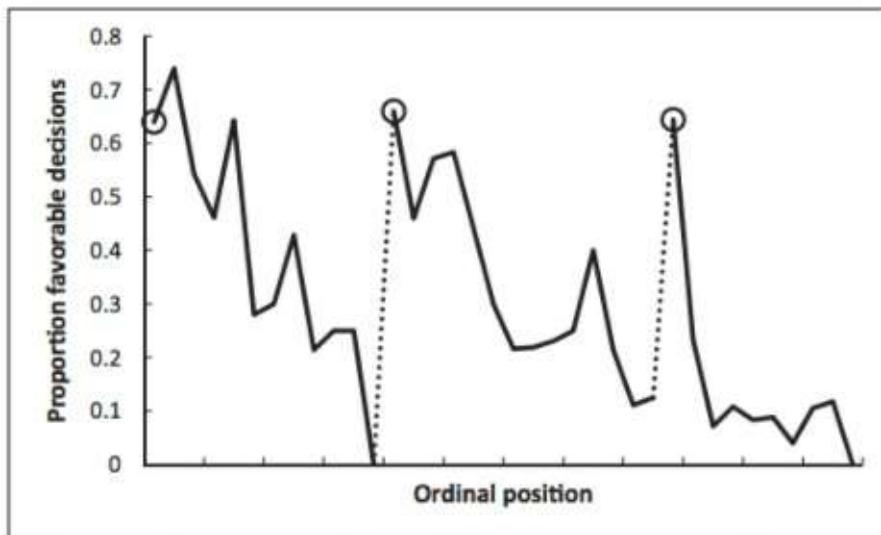
Fig. 1. Proportion of rulings in favor of the prisoners by ordinal position. Circled points indicate the first decision in each of the three decision sessions; tick marks on x axis denote every third case; dotted line denotes food break. Because unequal session lengths resulted in a low number of cases for some of the later ordinal positions, the graph is based on the first 95% of the data from each session.

Image source: Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences

Does the time of day, or the judges level of hunger really contribute that greatly to their decision making? Yes, it does. The research went on to show that at the start of the day the likelihood of the judging giving out a favorable ruling was somewhere around 65%.

But as the morning dragged on, the judge became fatigued and drained from making decision after decision. As more time went on, **the odds of receiving a** favorable **ruling decreased steadily until it was whittled down to zero**.

However, right after their lunch break, the judge would return to the courtroom feeling refreshed and recharged. Energized by their second wind, their leniency skyrockets back up to a whopping 65%. And again, as the day drags on to its finish, the favorable rulings slowly diminish along with the judge's spirits.

This is no coincidence. According to the carefully recorded research, this was true for all 1,112 cases. The severity of the crime didn't matter. Whether it was rape, murder, theft, or embezzlement, the criminal was more likely to get a favorable ruling either early in the morning, or after the judges lunch break.

We all suffer from decision fatigue without even realizing it

Perhaps you aren't a judge with the fate of an individual's life at your disposal, but the daily decisions you make for yourself could hinder you if you're not in the right head-space.

Regardless of how energetic you feel (as I imagine it is somehow caffeine induced anyway), you will still experience decision fatigue. Just like every other muscle, your brain gets tired after periods of overuse, pumping out one decision after the next. It needs a chance to rest in order to function at a productive rate.

Decision fatigue can have some detrimental consequences

When you are in a position such as a Judge, you can't afford to let your mental state dictate your decision making; but it still does. According to George Lowenstein, an American educator and economy expert, decision fatigue is to blame for poor decision making among members of high office. The disastrous level of failure among these individuals to control their impulses could be directly related to their day to day stresses at work and their private life.

When you're just too tired to think, you stop caring. And once you get careless, that's when you need to worry. Decision fatigue can contribute to a number of issues such as impulse shopping (guilty), poor decision making at work, and poor decision making with after work relationships. You know what I'm talking about. Don't dip your pen in the company ink.

For more effective decision making:

Either alter the time of decision making to when your mind is the most fresh, or limit the number of decisions to be made. Try utilizing the following hacks for more effective decision making.

Make your most important decisions in the beginning: Don't waste your first 3 hours

You want to make decisions at your peak performance, so either first thing in the morning, or right after a break.

Research has actually shown that you are the most productive for the first 3 hours ((Inc: In an 8-Hour Day, the Average Worker Is Productive for This Many Hours)) of your day. Utilize this time! Don't waste it on trivial decisions such as what to wear, or mindlessly scrolling through social media.

Instead, use this time to tweak your game plan. What do you want to accomplish? What can you improve? What steps do you need to take to reach these goals?

Form habits to reduce decision making: You don't have to choose all the time

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day, but it doesn't have to be an extravagant spread every morning. Make a habit out of eating a similar or quick breakfast, and cut that step of your morning out of the way. Can't decide what to wear? Pick the first thing that catches your eye. We both know that after 20 minutes of changing outfits you'll just go with the first thing anyway.

Powerful individuals such as Steve Jobs, Barack Obama, and Mark Zuckerberg don't waste their precious time deciding what to wear. In fact, they have been known to limiting their outfits down to two options in order to reduce their daily decision making.

Take frequent breaks for a clearer mind

You are at your peak of productivity after a break, so to reap the benefits, you need to take lots of breaks! I know, what a sacrifice. If judges make better decisions in the morning and after their lunch break, then so will you.

The reason for this is because the belly is now full, and the hunger is gone. Roy Baumeister, Florida State University social psychologist ((The New Yourk Times Magazine: Do You Suffer From Decision Fatigue?))had found that low-glucose levels take a negative toll on decision making. By taking a break to replenish your glucose levels, you will be able to focus better and improve your decision making abilities.

Even if you aren't hungry little breaks are still necessary to let your mind refresh, and come back being able to think more clearly.

Structure your break times. Decide beforehand when you will take breaks, and eat energy sustaining snacks so that your energy level doesn't drop too low. The time you "lose" during your breaks will be made up in the end, as your productivity will increase after each break.

So instead of slogging through your day, letting your mind deteriorate and fall victim to the daily abuses of decision making, take a break. Eat a snack. Let your mind refresh and reset, and jump-start your productivity throughout the day.

Make Right Decisions Fast Like a Fighter Pilot

You have less than 3 seconds to make a decision. The situation is changing faster than you can think. In the moment you take action, you must immediately reassess and make the next decision. The wrong choice could cost you your life. This is air to air combat, where fighter pilots make the right decisions fast using a highly effective system called the "OODA Loop."

What a fighter pilot can teach you about making decisions quickly?

You can leverage the OODA Loop model to improve the speed and quality of your own decision making.

The OODA Loop is a repeatable process for making better decisions. It uses a 4 point decision making loop to support quick, effective and proactive decision making.((Mind Tools: OODA Loops)) OODA stands for **Observe, Orient, Decide, Act.** It is referred to as a "loop" because it's designed to be repeated immediately upon completion. The more rapidly you can move through the loop, the more effective the process becomes. Simplicity is the critical element that allows the model to be applied universally.

The term "OODA Loop" was coined by Col. John Boyd of the US Air Force,((Avion History: Col. John Boyd)) who earned the nickname "40 second Boyd" because he could defeat any opponent in less than 40 seconds. Boyd's tactical brilliance revolutionized air combat. Today, there are many different models that articulate the same concept. Jocko Willink and Leif Babin have "Relax, look around, make a call" in their book *Extreme Ownership*. In *A Spy's Guide to Thinking*, John Braddock describes the decision making process with the acronym DADA (Data, Analysis, Decision, Action).

Pilot, entrepreneur, and SWAT operator Andrew Cull makes a strong case for using the OODA Loop.((Andrew Cull)) He has personally used the model to land planes in zero visibility, negotiate business deals, and physically take down criminals. According to Cull,

> "The OODA Loop allows you to coordinate and organize your thought process. More complicated models are inaccessible the moment your brain goes into stress response."

But even if you are not in these high stakes situations, you can still benefit from using this model. This post lays out a few key applications of the OODA Loop: A learning system, a method for dealing with uncertainty, and a strategy for winning head-to-head contests and competitions.

However, the OODA Loop is incompatible with certain mindsets.

When used correctly, there are no downsides to the model itself. But with certain mindsets, the OODA loop is incompatible. For example, if you are inflexible in your thinking or unwilling to take decisive action, this is probably not the best decision making framework.

Mr. Cull shared a perfect case study to explore a the OODA Loop step by step. Shortly after takeoff, he hit unexpectedly low cloud cover at 100 feet. The dark of night combined with the thick cloud cover left him with 0 visibility. Enter the OODA Loop:

1. **Observe:** According to Cull, the first thing he observed was that he was "surprised and freaked out." Acceptance and awareness of those feelings allowed him to adjust his focus accordingly. He also immediately began observing data from the relevant instruments.
2. **Orient:** Cull assembled all of the available information to establish a full understanding of his position. Some of the information he used to orient himself included visual data, instrument data, previous flying experience, and physical sensations in that moment.
3. **Decide:** After quickly and accurately orienting himself, he realized there was no way to determine how thick the cloud cover might be. He made the decision to land the plane immediately.
4. **Act:** He began a slow descent in the proper direction to get below the cloud cover and regain partial visibility.
5. **Repeat:** An extremely rapid, non-stop OODA Loop resulted in a quick and safe landing.

As you implement the OODA Loop personally, keep these strategic ideas in mind.

- **Mobilize your will.** This means a mindset of humility and objectivity, and a readiness to take decisive action. Consciously bringing these qualities to the process are the grease that keeps the OODA engine running smoothly.
- **Start with a familiar environment.** Environmental stress can interfere with learning. Once you have it down, you will be able to use the model as a tool to mitigate stress.
- **"Tactics come easy when principles are in the blood."** Highly relevant wisdom from

Josh Waitzkin's The Art of Learning. Practice until you have fully internalized the OODA Loop as your natural default process for decision making.

- **Troubleshoot as you go.** If the process does not appear to be working, check for interference from ego and over-thinking. Look for ways to take more ownership.

Doom Looping a Mistake Is Dumb

Whether it's the friend who keeps falling for the wrong person, the employer who can't seem to make things better at work, or the individual who won't stick to a healthy routine, we all know someone caught in a negative cycle. The concept of the vicious cycle is nothing new. In yogic philosophy, the repeating patterns that manifest in our lives are called *samskaras*. ((Yoga Journal: Stuck in a Rut))

Samskaras can be positive or negative. They are reinforced by repetition until they become second nature. Some yogis use the imagery of a butter knife running along a pat of butter as a way to explain *samskaras*. The knife leaves tiny ridges on the butter, and as you continue to run the knife along the same pattern, the grooves become deeper. When we develop positive patterns, they become easier to maintain over time. When our *samskaras* are negative, we enter into what is referred to in systems thinking as "doom looping." Doom looping is as ominous as it sounds--problems compound and initial solutions don't seem to have a positive effect.

It really isn't easy at all to get out of a doom loop.

It's easy to get caught in a vicious cycle. Imagine, for instance, a person trying to lose weight. This person may vow to exercise daily and eat better food. The morning begins full of commitment to the goal of living a healthier lifestyle, but then the person encounters a big pile of doughnuts in the break room at the office. This individual, feeling the mid-afternoon energy-slump that is perpetuated by their unhealthy body and schedule, eats a doughnut or two. He or she gets through the work day on a sugar high, but after arriving home, there's dinner to cook, the sugar buzz has worn off, and ultimately the person becomes too tired to exercise.

Despite all those good intentions, the individual reinforced a negative pattern that will be harder to break tomorrow. Tomorrow when they get up, they will feel the cumulative effects of poor habits plus their recent failure to stick to a goal. Thus, they have initiated the doom loop.

But breaking the vicious cycle is the only way to stop negativity from coming back.

Employee turnover, poor health, and unhappiness are a handful of the many symptoms of being caught in a doom loop. In some cases, struggle may feel so natural that it is the only condition that people know. The cycle of poverty is a classic example of this.((NPR: One family's story shows how the cycle of poverty is hard to break)) Even though people in this situation understand that there are better possibilities, they lack access to them because of a series of compounding factors. This sort of cycle must be broken at a systemic level, and is not likely to be resolved through the power of a single individual.

In other cases, businesses or entities may become reactive to problems instead of performing a proper causal analysis. They respond to an immediate need without fully understanding the problem. A company may notice that employee turnover is high, which leads them to increase their benefits package. This may draw new workers, but they fail to address the root of their issue, which is the tyrannical manager that makes every day a challenge for employees.

A school with a poor performance record may develop a turnaround plan that involves firing most of the teachers. Such drastic measures fail to yield results that districts desire in most cases.((Educational Leadership: Research Says… / Drastic School Turnaround Strategies Are Risky)) In this instance the environment has been further destabilized by the reactionary policy.

Whether you are personally affected by doom looping, or you are watching it play out for someone else, there are steps that can break the cycle. The results may not be instantaneous, but they will be sustainable.

Sometimes we are so close to the problem that it can be difficult to see where we're going wrong. The actions that lead us to this place feel normal to us, after all. Negative cycles can rob us of our power. You may be able to recognize the problem on your own, but there's no shame in reaching out for help if you feel that you can't resolve the issue alone.

Here's a powerful way to stop circling the drain.

One of the main reasons that people fall into doom cycles is that they don't take time to perform a causal analysis on their situation. If you attempt to tackle a problem without fully addressing its roots, you are putting a bandage on a broken arm. Our fast-paced world values quick results. Self-reflection, the key to breaking the vicious cycle, has become secondary to ideas that provide instant gratification.

To get to the root of the problem, you can use the "5 Whys" method.

At its most basic level, this method involves naming the problem, and then asking yourself why the problem is occurring five times.

For example:

1. Employee turnover is high. Why?
2. Workers are unhappy. Why?
3. Their work-life balance is poor. Why?
4. Their manager expects them to take work home with them. Why?
5. As a company, our goals for this quarter are too ambitious for our staff. Why?

As you can see, this reflective line of questioning can yield some insights into what has led to such a high turnover rate for the company.((iSixSigma: Determine the root cause: 5 Whys)) After this causal analysis, leaders may decide that they need to re-evaluate their quarterly goals so that they do not put inordinate pressure on the manager. By rethinking their strategy, they may be able to keep the manager from asking employees to take work home with them, which may make them feel better about their jobs.

A second way to break out of the doom loop involves using the following line of inquiry:((Systems Thinker: Identifying and Breaking Vicious Cycles))

1. Name a symptom of the problem. What is something that seems to be getting worse for you as time goes on?

I struggle to pay my bills every month.

2. Choose three immediate and independent causes. What are three things that lead to the symptom you described above.

My job doesn't pay me very much. I buy things on impulse. I feel social pressure to keep up with everyone else.

3. State the consequences of the causes. How are your behaviors impacting your life?

I'm stressed all the time. My cupboards are always empty. People think I have more money than I do.

5. Demonstrate how the consequences perpetuate the causes. How do the consequences of your actions enable the symptom to continue?

Since people think I have more money than I do, they expect me to lead a certain lifestyle that involves spending lots of money. This keeps me from saving and causes me to dip into my rent and grocery money.

Break your chains!

Samskaras are a natural part of our existence. When vicious cycles arise from negative patterns, it is up to us to break them. Causal analysis should always begin with self-study. Whether you choose to use one of the methods listed above, employ the assistance of a life-coach or therapist, keep a journal, or engage in mindfulness exercises, persistence will allow you to identify the core of the doom loop.

Don't allow yourself to be a prisoner to unhealthy mindsets and habits. You are the driver of the change that you want to see in your life.

You Don't Need Much, Keep Less Stuff

Roughly this time last year I was hit with a sudden, overwhelming feeling of stress. I would come back to my messy, cluttered room, my mind on studies, social life, plans, life choices, my bank account, and the crazy ending to the season finale of *The Walking Dead.* I'd rest for a bit and then leave to go to either the library, class, or work. I came to realize that my mind was as cluttered as my bedroom.

Our minds and lives can be weighed down by unnecessary extras (clutter) affecting our thoughts, behavior, and health. Lots of little things can become pretty heavy, and though things in our minds have no physical weight, they nonetheless can weigh us down. It makes you wonder how much is really *needed*.

What can be done?

We have come to think that having our lives and minds cluttered is just an ordinary part of life in the 21st century -- that it's part of being an adult because with age comes...stuff. However, that isn't the case. You need to ask yourself what you actually *need*. Much like your bag becomes lighter when you take out unnecessary items, cutting stuff from your mind makes *it* lighter and your life easier.

It's often very difficult to ascertain what is necessary and what is unnecessary, but you don't have to do it all by yourself. Here is a list of ways to declutter your mind and your life, and walk unburdened by unnecessary weight. Don't worry. I'm not going to suggest getting rid of *everything* and living off the grid although that might work, too! First let's try baby steps.

1. Declutter your house.

We form emotional connections with our possessions. They may represent a future we want, or a past that we don't want to forget, so choosing what needs to be eliminated can be difficult. It takes time to sort through our belongings. Things that you want can be organized and put away; things you no longer need can be donated. (Being charitable has been shown to have a positive effect on your mood.)((Greater Good: 5 Ways Giving Is Good for You)) Decisions may be tough, but they are worthwhile.

2. Declutter your yard if you have one.

This follows a similar logic to decluttering your house. The tidiness of your entire living space has an effect on your mental well-being. However, whereas sorting and clearing clutter in your house may have a long-lasting positive impact, your yard will require continual attention. This isn't due to an abundance of *things*, but rather to the processes of nature. If ignored, the growth of grass and weeds can get out of control and turn your yard from a place of relaxation to a tangled mess. The solution is to tool up and garden! Research((SAGE Journals: Gardening Promotes Neuroendocrine and Affective Restoration from Stress)) has shown that gardening is a great stress reliever. The act of removing offending weeds and overlong grass will lessen stress in your life.

3. Find peace of mind with meditation and mindfulness.

Before you click away, this article hasn't taken a sudden turn for New Age solutions! What was once the domain of yogis, Buddhists, and slightly strange young men, meditation has recognized health benefits through decluttering the mind and calming runaway thoughts. ((Forbes: 6 Scientifically Proven Benefits Of Mindfulness And Meditation)) Though meditation has been practiced for thousands of years, only recently have the myriad benefits become widely known, and its popularity has exploded.

Through simply sitting comfortably, closing your eyes, and focusing on your breathing, you'll increase mastery of your mind and thoughts. You'll be less prone to distractions, become generally more relaxed, and stresses in your life will seem less severe. Though meditation is pretty close to literally doing nothing, its positive effects are numerous and far reaching.

Meditation is an ancient practice, yet there are countless classes, websites, and books, as well as the religion of Buddhism which will give you understanding of it. It's not just decluttering; it's making *more* mental space.

4. Sharpen your mind with sleep.

Our bedrooms have long ceased to be places for mere sleeping. These days they have become vaults for stuff or even offices or mini-gyms, allowing us to do many things at the expense of good sleep. Our rooms are full of so many distractions that sleep becomes more difficult.((The New York Times: Distractions May Shift, but Sleep Needs Don't)) Studies((PNAS: Evening use of light-emitting eReaders negatively affects sleep, circadian timing, and next-morning alertness)) have shown that the light emitted from a phone or laptop screen at night signals to your brain that you need to stay awake, regardless of your intention.

Sleep deprivation has numerous serious effects((WebMD: 10 Things to Hate About Sleep Loss)) which harm your health, your cognitive abilities, and lead to depression and anxiety. Having these distractions is just not worth it. The solution to this is to declutter your room, removing any potential distractions. (It may be a good idea to consider setting up a sleep regimen ensuring you get the vital eight hours of sleep that your body needs.)

5. Cut your bad habits.

We all have little quirks--everyday actions that we hardly notice. It could be something as innocuous as cracking our knuckles, or as serious as regular weekend benders. Some may be affecting your health, so what do you do about them? There are numerous techniques((WebMD: 3 Easy Steps to Breaking Bad Habits)) for stopping bad habits and some are surprisingly simple. Merely being aware of them is a great step towards their eventual elimination. One effective way to cut out bad habits is to replace them with good ones, substituting positive behavior to declutter or de-stress your life.

6. Eliminate your addictions if you have them.

This is a more serious version of the step above. Addictions have more negative effects than habits. This paragraph isn't going to provide the miracle solution to a smoking or drinking addiction, or the over-usage of certain (cough) websites. However, if decluttering your life is your intention, you will likely find few things as profoundly powerful as eliminating negative dependencies. Addictions may seem a core part of your being but have a severe impact on your physical and mental health, so their elimination can be a good thing.

7. Declutter emotional baggage from your friendships.

If you are like me, then your friendships are the single most important part of your life. However, there may come a time when communication with a friend becomes strained and difficult. Were they not a friend you could cut them from your life, but you generally enjoy their company. Such difficult situations may be causing you significant stress.

The key to resolving this is in communication.((Psychology Today: Clear Needless Emotional Clutter From Your Relationships)) Try to become aware of particular words and phrases you use which may be having negative consequences. For example, if in conversation you use the word "not" frequently, it adds a negative tone. Instead of "I'm not going to that" (which implies "*with you")* try "I think I'd rather stay at home" or "I think I'm going to X". (It may

sound small and nit picky, but consider what *you* would rather hear. You may have experienced a pang of negativity when someone structured a sentence poorly which made them seem brusque with you.) Even though these are small steps, over time you may find that your relationship improves.

8. Declutter negative people.

This may be severe, but the people you surround yourself with have an effect on you. Even if you intend to become a more positive person, this will be tougher if the people around you are obstinately negative. You don't have to do something as drastic as getting rid of friends, but merely *increase* your social circle to surround yourself with people who are how you want to be and you will find it easier to become more positive.

9. Declutter your fridge.

It is important to be mindful of your weight and eating habits and it will be easier to do if your fridge is clean and organized. This can affect your physical and mental health. There is a link between mood and eating well or poorly.((Good Housekeeping: What to Eat – And to Avoid! – When Bad Moods Strike)) If someone feels stressed, they are more likely to overeat or eat poorly. If their eating habits are causing them unhappiness and stress it can start a vicious cycle. A clean, decluttered fridge stocked with healthy choices can help us make more effort to eat well.

10. Declutter your work life.

There are many ways to do this. If you have a desk or work station that is a mess, it could be causing you extra stress at work. If you find yourself overwhelmed by a ridiculous number of tasks, then taking some time to plan and prioritize your tasks and to organize your work area will make the job a little easier.((Financial Times: How to declutter your working life))

If you consider and put into action the above ten steps, then you will find the clutter in your home, life, mind, and work fall away. Life doesn't need to be so stressful!

Section II: Social Animal and Time

Human beings are social animals. The tenor of our social life plays a very important role in influencing our mental health. A lack of positive and durable relationships will make our minds and bodies fall apart. All our relationships are interrelated in some ways, one negative relationship can have great impact on the rest of the relationships. This section will help you build better relationships and enjoy each of them more.

The Hidden Power of Every Single Person Around You

Other people's thoughts and behaviors influence you. The people with whom you surround yourself affect your potential. This isn't just speculation.

A person's economic mobility is largely determined by the county they live in.((The Equality of Opportunity Project: The Geography of Upward Mobility in America)) Children from low income communities are less likely to have high earning potential than their affluent peers. It's hard to break out of your surroundings.

Groups of friends may subconsciously pick up one another's behaviors and living style. They use similar phrases when they speak, and they may influence each other's clothing choices.

The effect of peer groups has not gone unnoticed in the corporate world as Jim Rohn quote,

> "You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with."

When we surround ourselves with strong, high-achievers with good character, we are more likely to become just like them. On the other hand, imagine how much of a negative influence low-achievers can have on you. If your five best friends have a poor outlook on life and are satisfied with sub-par performance, then there's a good chance that some of that negativity will rub off on you.

Others' Influence Is Easily Overlooked

In order to improve your life, associate with people with higher standards than you. If you have high expectations for yourself and you surround yourself with people who also have bold expectations, you'll have a greater quality of life.

Everything that you allow into your life and every action you take reflects who you are. Tony Robbins once said,

> "Let your grind be a reflection of the standards that you have set for yourself."

This doesn't necessarily mean that you have to have the fanciest things or work in the corner office right away, but it does mean that you do the best with whatever means you have. You don't have to be top dog at the company to do excellent work. You don't have to be wealthy to keep things organized. Going above and beyond will take you to the next level of success.

If you feel like you're stagnating in your current situation, it might be time to make some changes. Change and growth can arise when you make conscious choices about your environment.

Beyond aspiring to improve your environment, keeping better company can go a long way toward helping you reach your goals. You can't go through your life without people, and the types of people with whom you associate can impact your work.

For example, if your friends tend to waste lots of time on their phones and social media, you might be drawn into that cycle of distraction. If you're health-conscious, but your peers spend all day munching on cookies and chips, you'll have a hard time sticking to a nutritious diet.

On the other hand, when you're surrounded by people who are focused when they're working, you are more likely to be focused. In fact, it's hard not to be focused because you want to be included and you don't want to be responsible for breaking someone's concentration. If you've never felt this type of motivation, step into a university library around finals. Everyone is united in their drive to succeed.

Your Network Is Your Net Worth

It's a quote from Tim Sanders, the former director of Yahoo!

When you surround yourself with people who hold high standard to you, you are surrounded by people who strive to do better. Their energy is contagious and will positively influence you.

Motivation and dedication are contagious.

Imagine working on a team in which 80% of team members are highly motivated and 20% of them slack off. The slackers are in the minority, and they are surrounded by the high achievers.

For the 20%, there are only two options for them. They can't continue to put out mediocre work because the 80% will not accept it. They will either be influenced to do better work, or they will quit because they are unwilling to keep up. In the end, 100% of the remaining workers will be highly motivated.

If we switched the percentages of high achievers and unmotivated workers, there would be a different outcome. If 80% of workers have a low level of motivation and 20% are highly motivated, the team's outputs will be low quality. The high achievers will either lower their

own standards, or they will become fed up with their team members' lackadaisical approach. In the end, all remaining team members will exhibit uninspired work performance.

You'll do more than you thought you could do.

When you are surrounded by people with low standards, you may feel like you don't have to put in extra work. You may perceive yourself as good enough because you aren't comparing your work with people aiming for continuous improvement.

This means that even though you may be doing better than the average person in your peer group, you haven't even scratched the surface of your full potential. Highly motivated people are constantly striving for improvement, and when you spend time with them, you recognize that you have plenty of growing to do too. You'll make more breakthroughs than you thought possible because you are pushing yourself.

For example, I studied Spanish when I was in college. Most people who were taking the Spanish didn't care too much about it. When we had to review our translations in class, I was always stuck with a low-achiever. There seemed to be no upside to me putting in extra work since I wasn't able to learn from my partner. I did well enough to get good grades, but I wasn't progressing as much as I could have.

My professor was a great teacher, and he noticed that I didn't seem to be getting much out of group work with my current partner. He paired me with the top student in the class. Suddenly, both of us started doing better work because we were 100% invested in our studies. Her high standards pushed me to work harder and think more deeply. My willingness to learn helped her sharpen her skills by discussing the work with me.

When you control your environment, you control your life.

A fulfilling life doesn't just come about through a stroke of good luck. If that were true, then people who win the lottery would be guaranteed happiness. In fact, most people who hit the jackpot end up miserable because even though they acquired a windfall of cash, they could not control the people and circumstances around them.((Time: Powerball: Here's How Winning the Lottery Makes You Miserable))

The habits that you commit to every day can have a greater positive impact on your life than getting a large sum of money. When you surround yourself with people who help you grow, you'll make greater gains. Peers who enrich your life with their presence and actions can help you reach your goals.

One of my friends is a talented artist. He can take what other people would consider to be junk and turn it into fantastic sculptures. He came from a family that did not support his talent. He wanted for nothing in terms of food, clothing, and shelter, but he was completely

miserable.

My friend almost gave up on his dream until he met other artists in college. He was surrounded by professors and students who believed in the transformative power of art. He began practicing his craft every day, and today he makes his living off his work.

For my friend, his family life was toxic. Even though he had all of his needs met, he didn't flourish until he was surrounded by people who had high expectations of him.

Find Friends Who Strive for Excellence

If you feel that you're stuck, seek out people who have high expectations. Take notice of the coworker that is only satisfied with turning in the best work, and the friend who seems to have a clear direction in his or her life.

Connect with people that have rigorous standards for themselves and others. Talk to them to figure out how they reached their level of success. Perhaps they have a philosophy or mindset that you could adopt to improve yourself.

When you talk to these people, try to learn their perspectives about work, relationships, and life. Analyze why they think the way that they think. As your relationship develops, you can share your perspectives and seek feedback from them.

As you discuss life and work with them, think about what aspects of their approach you would like to incorporate into your life. If some mindset or action has propelled them to be successful, try to emulate that. Mimicking positive behaviors can change your attitude. This is just like forcing yourself to smile to induce happiness or striking a power pose to improve your confidence.

This is not the same as blindly copying whatever someone else does to be successful. This is about thoughtfully analyzing the successes of others and finding what works for you.

Every Relationship Should Push You to Be the Best Version of Yourself

It's important to keep high standards in all aspects of your life. Look for coworkers, friends and even a romantic partner that bring out the best in you.

By removing the toxicity from your life and seeking people that will accept nothing less than excellence from you, you set yourself up to achieve your dreams.

The Only 4 Types Of Friends You Need In Life

Are you aware that as you grow up, friendship is the thing that drifts away most easily? Work, vacation, relationships, family times — they're all so important to life that it's just hard to put friendship at a higher priority.

Have you ever been at supper at a friend's home, you and your friends just didn't have anything to talk about and had to force yourselves to just talk about something, like "so how have you been recently?", or "oh the pasta is really nice..."?

This kind of awkward situation only leaves us wondering what friendship is for; but then, we also feel uncomfortable to have to declare that friendship has to be for something — how contradicting we are.

Here's some good news for you...

Friendship does have its purpose, and having a purpose doesn't ruin true friendship.

People come to your life for a reason. (Duh.) People do come together to become friends for some reasons though.

Alex Lickerman, the author of *The Undefeated Mind: On the Science of Constructing an Indestructible Self* talks about the things that draw people together as friends.

Instead of building friendships with random people, we tend to build bonds with people who share the common interests, share common values, have gone through the same difficulties, and who support each other equally.((Alex Lickerman, Psychology Today: The True Meaning Of Friendship))

We're being selective about friends because not everyone can serve the purpose of being able to exchange thoughts and feelings with us.

When we get to know people, there are four things we really look for.((The School Of Life: The Purpose Of Friendship))

Firstly, we want reassurance so we know we're not alone in being a specific way.

Everyone of us has our weak spots. There's always something that we aren't satisfied with, or some thoughts that we're reluctant to share with others because we're afraid of being judged or being let down.

We need the kind of friend who understands our thoughts and weaknesses; so we can feel comfortable to let down our guard and be comfortable with who we are.

We also want to have fun with people who we can be silly with.

Life is stressful; and we're taught to always be serious and mature at work and in life as a grown-up. Imagine yourself as an elastic band, if you kept on pulling yourself and stayed tense, you'd eventually break. That's exactly what would happen if we didn't get enough fun in life.

Friends here, serve the purpose of letting you be as silly as you want and share the joy and excitement with you.

And we need someone's help to clarify our minds.

We're all imperfect people, sometimes we are confused and our minds go chaotic.

For example, very often we are frustrated at work and not quite sure why, but after we share our confusions with friends, we somehow get things figured out and have a clearer mind to go back to work.

A thinking friend who gives us constructive advice and asks us probing questions can inspire us to solve our problems and get to know ourselves better.

Finally, we network to seek collaborators to help us achieve our goals.

We have our own dreams and goals but we are small and fragile as an individual. To get things going, we need collaborators to align their abilities and energies with ours.

Take Emma Watson as an example, she's an activist in feminism, and she networks to gather like-minded people who also aspire to fight for gender equality through the *HeForShe* campaign and the feminist book club *Our Shared Shelf*.

The spiritual core reason for a friendship is help us change and grow.

Motivational speaker Jim Rohn once said,((Jim Rohn: 5 - The Law Of Averages))

> "You're the average of the five people you spend most of your time with."

This relates to the law of averages,((The Clemmer Group: Innovation and the Law of Averages)) a theory that the result of anything will be the average of all outcomes.

So if you want to grow, be successful, or simply be happy and positive; the people you spend time with matter.

Moving on from some friendships simply means you've understood what real friendship is like.

You may ask, "what about those who don't share my ambitions or interests? And those who can't reassure my existence? Or those who I don't really feel comfortable to be silly with?"

As time goes, you probably will feel difficult to stay friends with these people. Dare to let go of some people who don't help you change and grow as a better and a happier person.

It doesn't mean you've lost hope or belief in friendship, it simply means you've understood what a real friendship is like.

Move on from the friendships that you can hardly maintain. You don't need to deny having these friends, and you can keep the memories with you. Moving on is just a way to help you get closer to true friendships that are best for you and others.

This article is inspired by The School of Life's The Purpose of Friendship. Watch the full video here.

The Friendship Formula
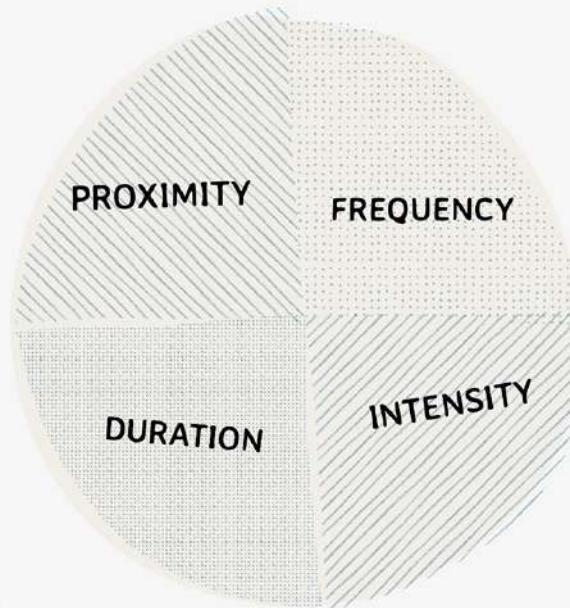
Meet Jesse. Jesse is a friendly person. She has just moved to a new apartment in New York City. She's excited, but nervous because she doesn't really know anyone in the area. As soon as she moves in, she strikes up a conversation with her neighbor. It didn't go as smoothly as she planned, and the conversation ended awkwardly. Jesse is embarrassed about it, so she tries again with a different subject. Still, the neighbor seems disinterested in a conversation with Jesse.

Jesse is frustrated and hurt. But she can't see that the neighbor was intimidated and irritated because of her aggressive attempts at conversation so soon.

So what can we do to avoid falling into this trap of being aggressive to others when all we want is just to be friendly?
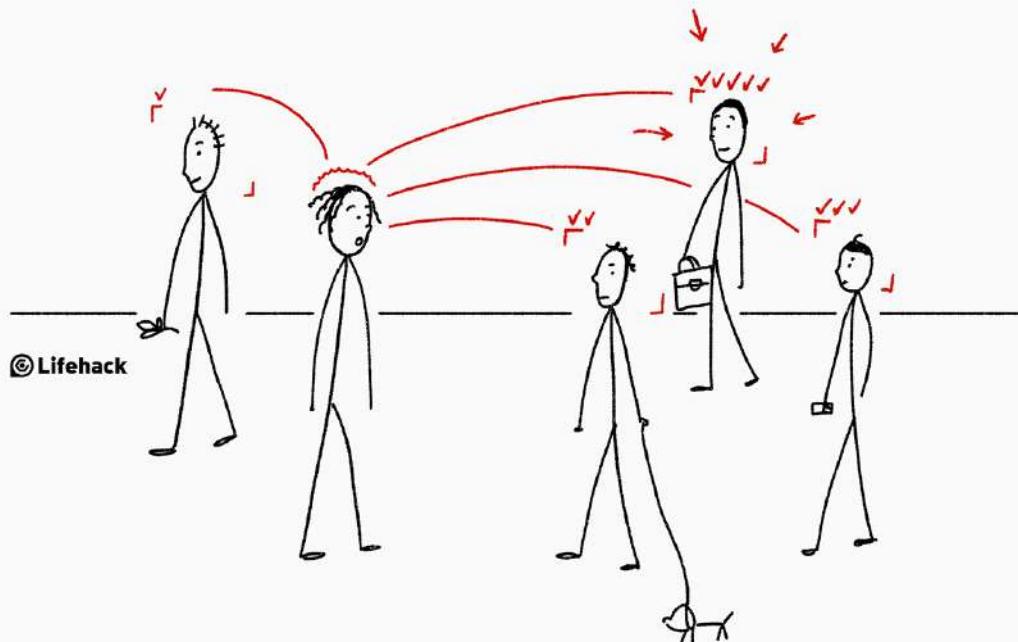
Dr. Jack Schafer, a retired FBI agent, introduced the Friendship Formula in the book, *The Like Switch*. Schafer was assigned to the FBI's National Security Behavioral Analysis Program, so he's an expert on human behavior and interactions. Here's the formula:

Friendship = Proximity + Frequency + Duration + Intensity

The elements in the formula help you to decide whether someone can be your friend. Our brains have something we'll refer to as a territory scan. When we access this part of our brain, we're assessing whether someone we're talking to could be our friend. This scan sends messages to our brain while processing the information needed to assess, among other things, if any given individual in our range of observation should be ignored, approached, or avoided entirely.

Let's take a look at each element of the formula.

Proximity

Proximity refers to the distance between you and another individual as it relates to your exposure to that individual. This can be anything from shared space to shared context. Proximity can be built by being close to someone as you stay silent and by their side. This quiet action can make the other person feel comfortable and non-threatening.

Frequency and Duration

The number of contacts you have with another individual over time is the frequency and duration in which you interact with them, as well as the length of time you spend with them.
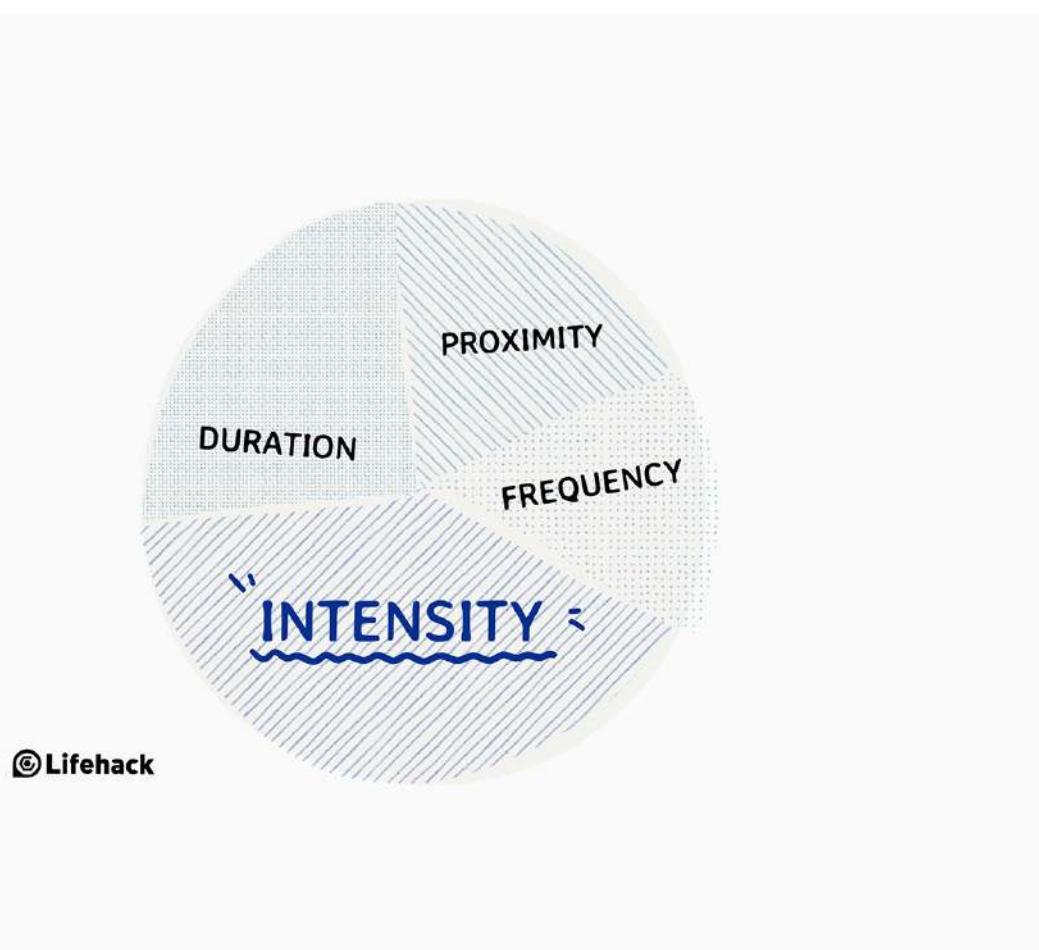
For example, the more time parents spend with their children, the more likely the parents will be able to influence them. Therefore, if parental duration is lacking, the children tend to spend more time with their friends, including, in extreme cases, gang members.

Intensity

How strongly you are able to satisfy another person's psychological and/or physical needs through the use of verbal and nonverbal behaviors is intensity. It also includes the interaction during the time spent with someone. Some couples have an issue with intensity. Maybe they spend time together every weekend for a few hours, but they don't interact much with each other and choose to focus their attention to their cell phones. This leads to lessened intensity and can slowly make the couple less intimate.

Essentially, the more time you spend with someone, the more they will like you. And the more intense (deep) those interactions are, the more they will like you.
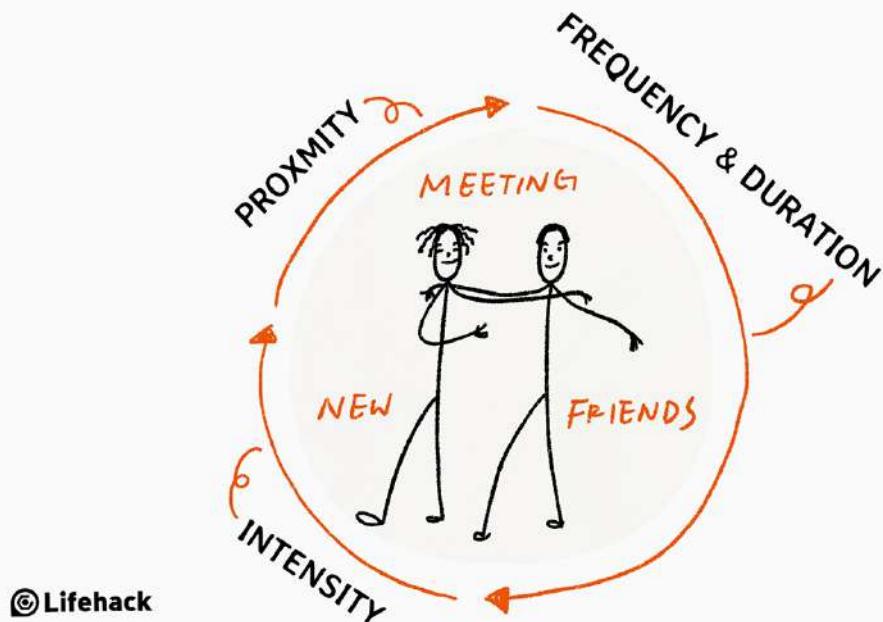
Take the relationship of a married couple. If they are too busy and don't spend quality time together, they are failing at frequency and duration. To compensate, they'll need a higher intensity/deeper connections/interactions.

Use the Formula to Make Friends

If there's someone you want to know, or befriend, start by increasing your proximity with them. Be around that person, but not in an obvious or over-attentive way. The goal is to become familiar to them so that they are comfortable with you being around. Slowly increase the frequency of time you are around that person.

Once you've increased the amount of time you're around, extend the duration of time spent. There can be some intensity (light, pleasant conversation), but after some time you can delve into some deeper topics. This is also a great way to make friends and break the ice when you have a new place to work or interact with someone at a party.

Use this formula too if you're trying to maintain a good friendship. You can learn more tips about how to stay friends with your best mates in my other article: Friends Don't Have to Grow Apart as You Grow Older

Take It Slowly

The next time you meet someone new and feel like jumping into conversation, pump the breaks. While being overzealous in life can sometimes be a good thing; when it comes to friendships, it's best to take it slow. While meeting new people can be exciting, if not a little nerve-racking, the Friendship Formula can help you master true connections.

The Harsh But True Meaning Behind Every "I Don't Have Time"

How often have you heard the line *"Sorry, I just don't have time"* in response to you suggesting an activity to a friend or asking for help? Perhaps you've said this yourself to other people. While it could be genuinely true for many, the harsh reality is that it's not usually entirely the case.

The Real Truth Behind "I Don't Have Time"

If we get this response, we usually give the person the benefit of the doubt - after all who are we to question how much time they really have? But at the back of our mind, we often wonder if we've just been given a quick and easy excuse. The only reason we do doubt it is because we've most likely given this excuse ourselves at some point. So what can it really mean?

- **I genuinely have a lot to do and I can't realistically fit it in:** For many of us, we take on far too much and although we would like to help or do something with someone, we feel stressed when there's a lot on our plate already.
- **I have more important things to do than doing that with you:** This sounds harsh but sometimes other, more important priorities, can take over at any particular time.
- **I don't have anything to do but I don't want to do that anyway:** It's cold but sometimes a person isn't in the mood, is tired or what you've suggested doesn't appeal to them. Perhaps in that moment, they were looking forward to hanging out on the couch with a good book and a glass of wine but feel a bit mean admitting that they'd prefer that to hanging out with you.
- **I don't have anything to do but I don't want to explain why I can't do that:** Sometimes it's easier to tell a white lie than to have to explain why you don't want to do something with someone. Maybe you're not in the mood or you actually don't like hanging out with that person much. It's usually a quick instinctive reaction to get out of it easily with no awkward questions.

Even though the underlying reasons behind this response can seem harsh, we can all admit that we can relate to at least one of them.

Question the Common Lie

About 90% of the time, if you hear this it's most likely a lie. But this isn't going to be shocking to us because we all know it. Yet we usually let it pass without question when someone says it to us. However, instead of dismissing this common lie, perhaps we should consider what it really means for our friendships and relationships with others.

You are a low priority. Is this really the basis of a good relationship with someone if they continually imply that you're not high priority in their life? Relationships take effort on both sides so if you're both using this excuse a lot then it may be time to question it.

You aren't getting the respect you deserve. We are all worthy of good relationships with friends, family and loved ones and we deserve respect. Ask yourself why you aren't getting that. Do they really value you as an important person in their life?

They can't be truthful with you. A real friend will tell you they have other plans and won't want to lie to you. They'll go to lengths to make it up to you, arrange another time because they want to spend time with you. If they feel they need to lie then there could be an underlying problem.

The Damage of This Well-Known Lie

Of course, we're also guilty of using this excuse. But what does it say about ourselves, our integrity and outlook on the relationships in our life?

Deep down we all know the meaning behind why we say it - whether we hear it from others or use it ourselves. But just because we don't openly admit what it really means, doesn't mean it's not having an impact. It gives people an unsaid impression of you that builds up over time and can damage potential close relationships or break close bonds.

The most common thoughts people have when they hear *"I don't have time"* tend to be:

- "You're so bad at organising what you're doing that you can't manage your time well."
- "What an arrogant person you are that you don't even bother telling me the real reason why you can't do it."
- "This person clearly doesn't respect our relationship, and now I'm starting to lose respect for them."

Make Time, or Tell the Truth

At the end of the day, it's all about *priority*. We all know that everyone has the same 24 hours in a day - it's more about our mindset and how we choose to organise our time. **We all have the choice to either make time for something or not.**

The key is to ditch the excuses and be honest. Explain why you don't have time because although this could come across as harsh, it's no more harsh than the impact of people wondering what the real reason is and diminishing respect on both sides.

Tell them it's not your priority

That's right, it's difficult to admit and say, isn't it? But being honest in this way is laying it out there. Our time is a limited resource and there's no point pretending it's not. Yes it may come across harsh but at least it's honesty rather than the other person feeling they've been fobbed off with an excuse which could ultimately cause more damage.

Follow up with a reason

The best thing to do is explain why in order to lessen the harsh reality. This will cause the person to understand your position a bit better and will have less negative impact on your relationship in the long run.

Arrange an alternative

Always try to carve out another time to make them a priority. If you want to cultivate your relationships, it's important to show them that they can be a priority to you, just not right now.

An example of this could be: a friend has asked you if you would come along next Friday night to check out her new exhibition. You probably could go technically, but you've been putting off sorting out your CV and job search for a while and you need to start prioritizing this. Instead of simply saying sorry, you don't have time, explain your priorities, wish her luck and arrange a coffee date later in the week to find out how it went.

Remember that this common excuse can be more damaging than you realize. If you find you use it a lot, it might be time to start questioning your values towards friendships and relationships with others. Start being more honest. It could save your integrity and connection with the important people in your life.

We Are Spending Too Little Time on Too Many People

Who have you interacted with in the last 24 hours? Coworkers, best friends, family, or facebook friends? Chances are, the people you have spent the majority of your time with are not highly important to you, but rather general acquaintances. Meanwhile, those who matter most to you didn't have much quality time with you.
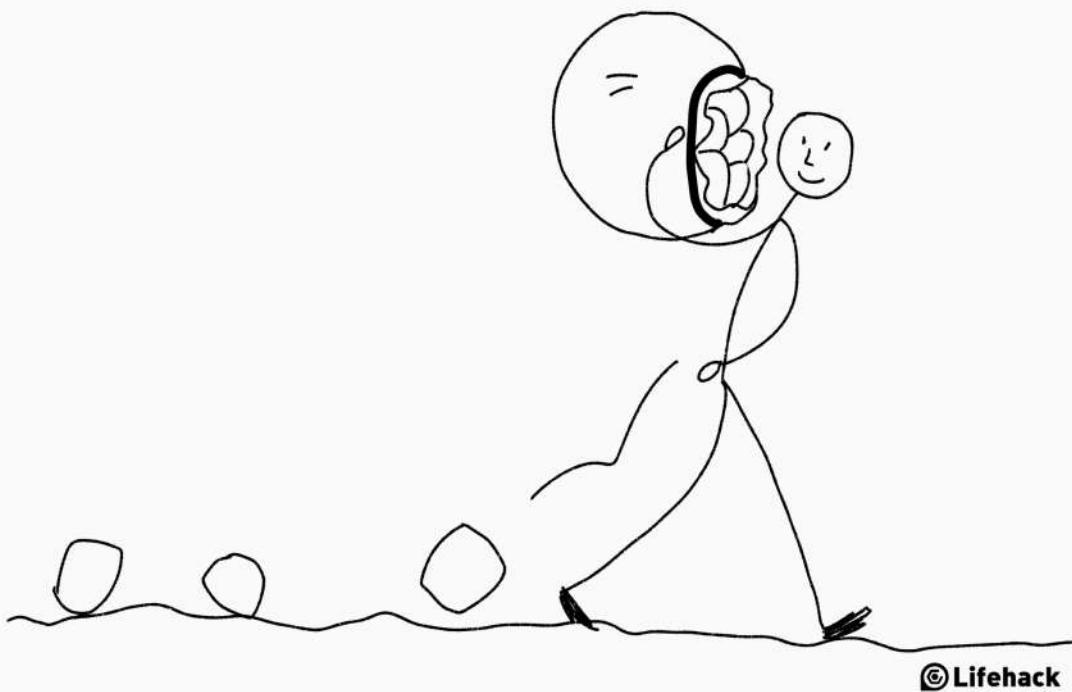
Technology is amazing because it allows us to keep up with people we would have otherwise lost track of. However, for the same reason, we interact with people very differently than we used to.

In the past, we wouldn't connect to so many people

In the past, we interacted with people we could see all the time - our real friends, our family members, and certainly our coworkers. If we wanted to see someone outside of those groups, we had to call them to hear their voice, or physically meet up with them somewhere. And when we did choose to meet up with someone, we were very present during our encounter.

When you were making time for other people, you valued the time with them more and could spend quality time with them.

If there were people who, as time went by, didn't really make time for real connections, they would naturally work their way out of your life. It's natural for relationships to appear and disappear throughout time. If we were to carry people as we moved on our lives, we would naturally let go some of them along the way. It'd look like this:
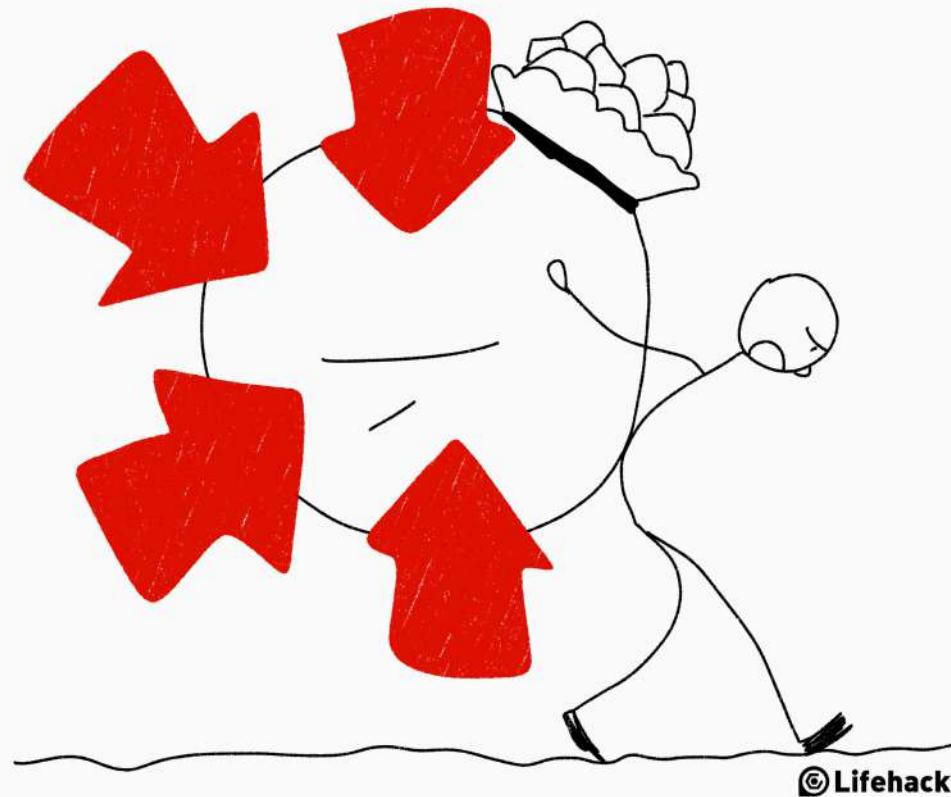
Today, connecting with people is almost too easy

Facebook, emails and text messages allow us to connect with others instantly, even if they are in different countries. And not just one person - group texts allow us to touch base with numerous friends, simultaneously. If you don't reach out to people via text, all it takes is a quick look at their Facebook status to know what they are doing.

Yet quick connections tend to be shallow. Think about this, how many of your facebook "friends" have you met in person more than one time? Even though you have no true connection with that person, you know everything about them! That knowledge is meaningless because you aren't truly connected.

As you walk forward in your life, you'll have more of these shallow connections. While at the time it can feel good, like you're popular and wanted, they will only hold you back from truly connecting with those in your life who matter. Instead of naturally letting go of some people along your way, you're carrying way too many of them which becomes a burden to you.
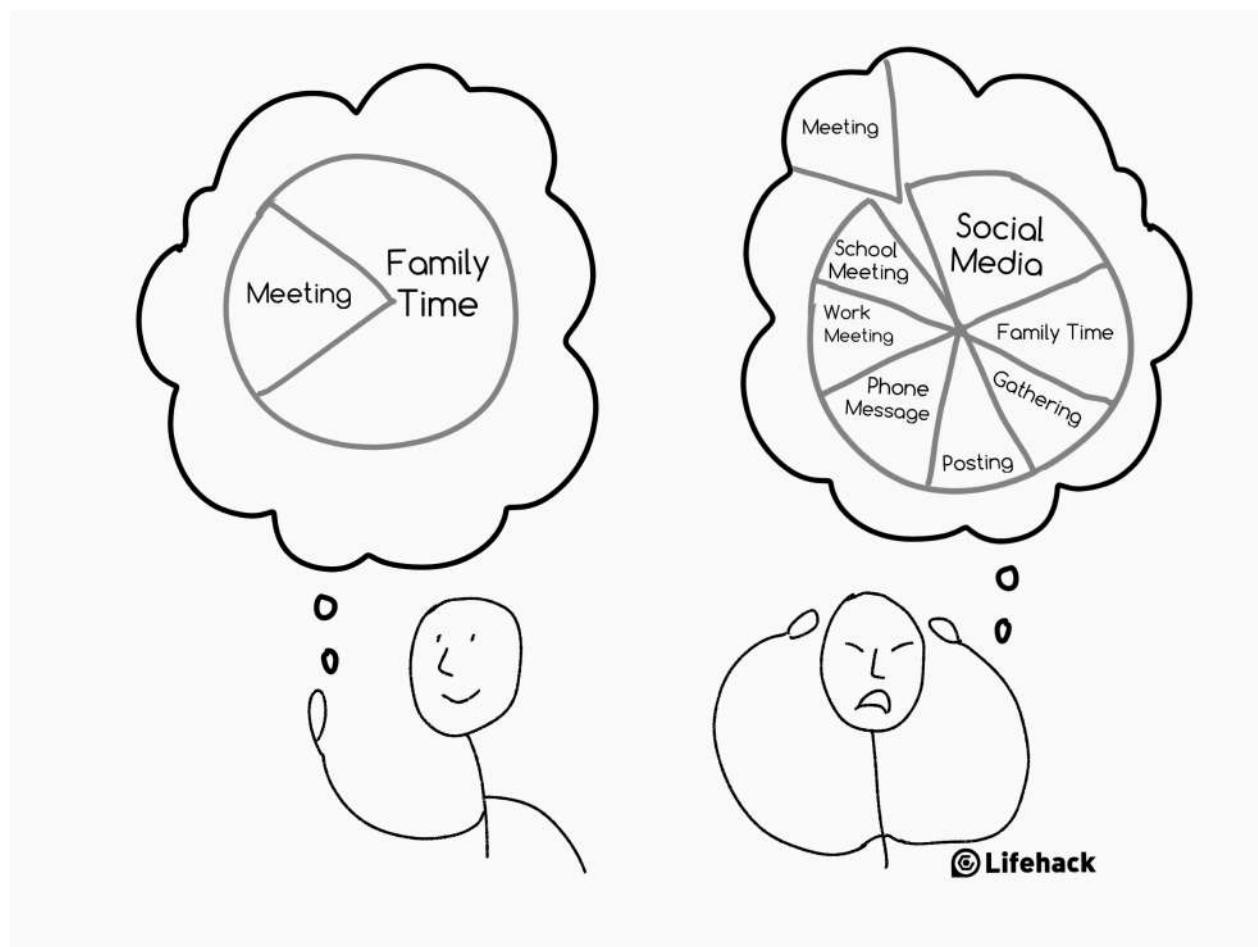
Connect deeper, not more

Quality is definitely more important than quantity when it comes to relationships. More connections can really mean more meaningless people taking away valuable time. The key is to make each connection count.

In the past, 80% of time was spent on people who matter to us. Now we spend that percentage on social media "friends" and text messages.

Filter out who is important to you and who is a hindrance

It may seem cruel to have to categorize and filter your friends, but it's harsher for you to spend time on people who aren't that important to you.

Go through your virtual friends and make a color-coded list. Red should label those people who are bad connections, and even selfish people in real life. Assign this label to the ones who guilt you into time with them. Sort the rest of your "friends" into blue labels (semi-shallow but with potential) and green (the real friends you care about). Get rid of all the red relationships and focus on developing more green.

Go back to this list again in a few weeks and see if any relationships are still distracting or should be in the red category. If so, delete those people. While it may seem harsh and you may fear they will notice and be upset, the truth is that you have to do what's best for you and those connections you truly care to cultivate.

If someone were to reach out to you, asking why they no longer see your post, be honest: tell them you needed to focus more on your immediate family and friends in order to be the best you possible. Check out this article about how this can make you connect with your true friends: I Deleted 564 Friends On Facebook But I Have Saved 100 Real Life Friendships

The right people deserve your time

If you related to what was mentioned in this article, click off and start sorting through your relationships right now. Get rid of relationships you are spending a ton of time of simply because it's easy. Choose to make more time, and put more effort into, the important connections. You owe it to them and to yourself.

Friendship Decluttering

Over the years you've developed a fair few friendships. While some are quite obviously close and fulfilling, there are some that you know deep down aren't serving you anymore. You may struggle to find much in common to talk about or you may have noticed you both have developed different values, mindsets, or interests. Perhaps you or they are heading in different directions in terms of career or family life.

Humans are social animals and connection is important to forming and maintaining a sense of happiness in lives. But some connections just aren't meant to last. Holding on to people despite a bad connection can end up draining your energy or even stunt your personal growth.

Embrace Labeling a Friendship

You've heard about the importance of decluttering homes every now and then, but what about friendships decluttering? The notion may seem harsh but it's important to stop and reflect on the people in our lives that aren't bringing us value.

In the book *The Power of the Other,* Dr. Henry Cloud discusses the influence that the people in our lives have on determining the amount of success we gain in our personal and professional lives.

There are three main types that can help you identify your current friendships: bad connections, pseudo-good connections and real connections. I'm labeling them with different colors so you know how to decide what friends to keep and ditch.

Red Label: The Bad Connections

These are the people who drain your energy. This usually manifests from a feeling that bad friendships are better than no friendships at all. They tend to make you feel negative emotions on a regular basis, drain your energy or just don't forge a deep connection. Examples of this kind of friendship could be someone who guilts you into spending time with them, are needy, find it funny to belittle you on a regular basis or you feel you give a lot to the friendship with very little effort back. There's also no feeling of trust between you - if you told them something in confidence, they would most likely spread your secret around.

Ultimately you can't grow from a relationship like this but instead it keeps you feeling small generating feelings of guilt, shame or fear.

Blue Label: The Pseudo-Good Connections

These friendships are the tricky ones to decipher. While they are the people who are positive and even encouraging, the relationship tends to be shallow. There's no vulnerability, no acknowledgement of the not-so fun side of life and you don't share your troubles. They will have a tendency to tell you what you want to hear rather than having your best interests at

heart. It could be a friendship where you know very little about what the other feels, or that they don't confide in you and you feel you can't confide in them. You do a lot of fun stuff together yet you still don't feel you truly know each other.

While it feels nice, the friendship is empty.

Green Label: The Real Connections

These are the ones that really have your back. You'll share your joys, fears, successes and failures with each other in a genuine and supportive way. There's no judgement but a strong feeling that there's a deep investment in each others' futures. If you do something questionable they will be sure to be the ones questioning you - out of love and your own growth. If you have a crisis going on, they will be the first one there to help you through it.

Friendship Decluttering Is Hard but Essential

Decluttering is easier said than done. Once you've identified someone you may want to let go of, the fear of missing out may come to the surface. This comes from the human instinct to avoid feelings of loneliness and being ostracised from the main group. It's also linked to our self-esteem and wanting validation from others even if it's from people who aren't the best for us. Common questions will arise such as what if they go off and do interesting things without you? What if you could develop a better friendship in the future? Maybe it's someone you've known so long that it's better to just stick with the friendship than to end it.

While it can be difficult, it's important to understand that ditching the bad connections will help the good connections to develop further and help you grow in the process. Having people who are truly supportive will provide you with the positivity energy you need to thrive. Read more about *The Hidden Power of Every Single Person Around You*

When you control your environment, you control your life. If you cultivate the best friendships in your life, you will maintain a better quality of life all round. You're much more likely to reach your goals because the influence of the people you spend the most time with shapes your mindset more than you think. People who motivate you, support you and see the best in you will consciously and subconsciously drive you towards what you want in life and you'll ultimately achieve more.

Control Your Life by Creating a Good Friendship Circle

To build up a good network of supportive and invested friends in your life, take these steps to carefully declutter your friendships.

1. Filter out your red and blue friendships

The first thing is to re-evaluate the red and blue labelled friendships in your life by thinking carefully about each person. These are the ones that will make you feel more lonely in the long term if you choose to hold on and focus on them.

When you think about them, how do they make you feel? If it's a constant negativity within you and you can't see how they add value to your life, then it's time to label them as a red or blue. The idea is to distance yourself from these friends so you can create space to let in more supportive and genuine people. You could choose to cut them out straight away or decide to say 'no' more often to their suggestions. Find out more in my other article how to face a toxic friend: *The Fallout of Not Facing the Toxic Behaviors of a Selfish Friend*

2. Spot out a potential green friendship

The more you identify with the traits that make a deep and healthy friendship, the more you will see it in other people.

Find people you can trust and shares your core values; someone who have your best interests at heart and aren't afraid to sugar-coat if it means knowing you'll grow. If you have a big decision, they will weigh out the pros and cons with you with your benefit in mind, even if it means you moving half way across the country from them. It goes both ways too - make sure you are giving them the best advice with no ulterior motives.

3. Be vulnerable and open up

This is essential to attract more meaningful relationships in your life. You reflect back what you put out so by opening up and not camouflaging yourself from others. This will allow others to do the same with you.

Don't be afraid to talk about your fears and voice your opinions. If you have a big dilemma at work or you're thinking about breaking up with someone, talk it out as this will make the other person feel they can do the same with you developing a trusted bond.

4. Put effort in the green friendships

Don't dismiss a friendship because that person moved halfway across the country from you or they're starting a new relationship. This can mean more effort to maintain a friendship but if the genuine connection, alignment and respect is there, it won't be too hard. The

connection you have is worth more than proximity or the amount of time you spend with each other.

This leads on to the importance of effort. The maintenance of a good friendship is what allows it to deepen, so exchange thoughts with each other regularly. If you have a big problem, talk it out with them and they will do the same with you. Interact with them using text, funny pictures or Facetime, call them up, share ideas, suggest plans, tell them about your day - this gentle connection with someone who is equally invested in you will help your friendship grow all the more.

By cutting out toxic relationships, you will start to see a massive difference in yourself and how you see the world around you in a more positive light. Don't underestimate what a real friend can bring to the table!

Making More Friends Only Makes You Even More Lonely

Chronic loneliness is a modern-day epidemic, and a sad one at that. We live in such a busy time, and it's all too common to sacrifice relationships for more work, more money, more *stuff.* But as a species, humans don't do well by themselves. We survive best in groups where we can look to others for support and empathy.

Despite the instinctual need for others, the percentage of Americans who say they frequently feel alone is at an all time high. In the 1970s and 1980s, the percentage was around 11% and 20%, respectively. Yet in 2010, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) repeated a similar study and the percentage was as high as 45%.((Fortune: Chronic Loneliness Is a Modern-Day Epidemic))

When feelings of loneliness seem to overwhelm us, the instinctual fix is to make more friends; to socialize. But all this really accomplishes is a more intense realization of loneliness.

Loneliness Exists Even with Physical Company

Feeling alone is not the same as truly being alone. Think about this common situation: in a family gathering, a handful of relatives are sitting at the table with others, but they are scrolling through Facebook on their phone or texting people who are not present. None of the people in this scenario are truly alone, but they do create loneliness. Through being more interested in their phone than physical company, they miss out on true human connection through company.

Another relatable example is patients in hospitals. While these ill people are quite literally surrounded with support, they often feel lonely and forgotten if their relatives do not stop by frequently. Any type of separation, be it literal or emotional makes us (and even animals) feel very alone and cut off.((The Atlantic: How Loneliness Begets Loneliness))

> In animals, it's not separating a monkey from any companion, it's separating them from a preferred companion. When we do that, we see the same effects in those monkeys that we see in humans; they feel lonely.

Connecting Is Easy, Deepening Is Not

Part of the problem with being hyper-social or making new "friends" to fill a void comes from the fact that those connections are actually empty. This is due to how simple it is to connect with new people.

Any time you open an app like Facebook or SnapChat, you're making connections with people. They could be long-time friends, acquaintances or even strangers, but the attention makes the line blur between true companion and internet stranger. A person can have thousands of friends on Facebook but only truly know 50 of them. The high number doesn't mean loneliness is an impossibility.

Another trend in the loneliness quick-fix is dating apps. If you need a mood booster or just want someone to compliment you and keep you company, any dating app can do the trick within minutes. There are often no strings attached, but along with being dangerous, this is also emotionally detrimental; while you may not feel alone for the hour you spend with a new person, as soon as they leave (most likely to never be heard from again), you feel even more alone than before.

Promiscuity Is a Loner's Drug

When you make new friends because of loneliness, you're being promiscuous. While this word is typically associated with dating a lot or being intimate very casually, the alternate definition is more about being indiscriminate or casual when it comes to who you surround yourself with.

Sure, it can feel good to connect with a lot of people, but new connections don't always lead to strong relationships. **The more shallow relationships you build, the more lonely you feel.**

Think back to the last time you realized you were ravenously hungry. You probably raided the pantry and ate whatever you could get your hands on, even if it was pure junk food. Making empty connections to try to fill a void is the same thing; When you're not being selective about who to connect with, you make plenty of shallow connections.

Beating the Loneliness-Free Addiction

Deep relationships connect people on an intimate level. When you truly connect with someone, you trust them. That trust allows you to exchange thoughts and feelings in order to truly grow as a person.

Shallow relationships, however, make people feel distant because thoughts and feelings are not exchanged and shared. Why would you share intimate thoughts and ideas with someone if you don't know you can trust them to keep it between you?

Shallow connections lead you back to the original problem – "a separation from a preferred companion", which leads to loneliness.

It's a vicious cycle: you feel lonely, you try to meet more people, you connect with even more unsuitable people, and those people leaving you more lonely. It's why wise people often say they would rather have two really close friends than 20 acquaintances.

So what are you supposed to do? Stop being a friendly person? No.

Stop Aiming for Making More Friends

Aim to connect with a few who you can share your mind with. The goal is to build real relationships on a solid foundation. If you were in love with a diamond bracelet but you couldn't afford it, wouldn't it be better to do without than to waste money on a cheap knock off that turned your wrist green? Knock-off friends are no different.

It's also important to note that friendship and connections with people should be done for you and your happiness, not to impress others or seem popular. Someone can be physically with a lot of people but still feel lonely. It doesn't matter how many people are impressed by your friend group; if you don't consider any of those people real friends, you've accomplished nothing.

When the people are the right ones, making friends with just a few of them is enough to give you the warmth and connection. When you find yourself physically alone, just sending a quick text to a real friend or two can make you feel better long-term. The real friends are the ones who will make you happy and challenge you to grow.

Find out the types of friends you need here: *The Purpose Of Friendship: The Only 4 Types Of Friends You Need In Life*

If you're feeling a little overwhelmed as to how to go about making real connections, start with understanding others' values to form a deeper connection.The more values you share with each other, the more likely the relationship will be a deep one. Read this article about knowing more about your values: *Knowing My Values Has Filled up the Long-Existed Missing Gap in My Life*

A Deep Connection Is More Worthwhile Than Hundreds of Shallow Ones

It's not a bad thing to make friends, it only becomes a problem when you don't pay attention to who you connect with and those so-called connections are vapid and empty.

Don't let your "hunger" for going loneliness-free blind you. Be selective about who you connect with. Develop deep connections and ditch the shallow ones. You're way too good for that anyway.

The Ping Pong Way to Connect Deeper

Making friends and building relationships is not easy for most of us.

Often the problem is moving beyond traditional conversation lines, such as: "Hi, how are you today?" and "Not the best weather, let's hope it'll be better for the weekend."

These lines do at least get you into a conversation with someone, but often their response closes down the interaction immediately: "I'm good thanks" and "The weather should be fine for the weekend."

If you find yourself getting stuck for words at this point, then you need to learn how to boost your interpersonal skills.

If You Want to Keep a Conversation Going, You Should Make It Like Playing Ping Pong.

If you've ever played table tennis, then you'll be able to quickly grasp the art of self-disclosure.

For example, when playing table tennis (also known as ping pong) with someone, you'll be engaging in a back-and-forth action with them. This is similar to how conversations are started and sustained.

One party introduces an idea or question - and the other party comments or answers.

Self-disclosure follows the same pattern. For instance, you've gone to lunch with a new colleague and beyond talking about the food - you've begun to run out of things to say. In this case, you could move into self-disclosure mode and say something like: "You may not believe it, but I've been working here for over 10 years. In fact, this is the longest job I've ever had."

By disclosing these couple of interesting facts about yourself, it's highly likely that your new colleague will choose to share something about themselves too. They may reply by saying: "Wow, 10 years is a long time. My longest job was only for 6 years. However, my wife has been working at the same place for 12 years now. That's longer than we've been married!"

You Won't Smash When the Game Begins. You Will Have Some Gentle Warm-Up First.

Coming back to our table tennis metaphor, think about a time when you played against a new opponent.

If it wasn't during an official competition, then you're likely to have spent a few minutes playing against each other in a casual warm-up. This would have allowed each of you to gauge how the other person played, and their probable skill level, etc.

Self-disclosure in conversations is much the same. Small talk moves to deeper issues, and gradually each party begins to reveal more of their dreams, fears and beliefs to the other person. Psychologists have labeled this natural occurrence as Social Penetration. ((Communications Studies: Social Penetration Theory))

Of course, a balance must always be found between openness and closeness. For instance, you may not want to reveal intimate details to a new acquaintance, yet, you may be comfortable doing that with an old friend.

You Get to Know If You're Good Matching Partners After a Few Rounds of the Game

Following a fun warm-up, a table tennis game typically starts to move to a more serious level. It's at this point that you and your opponent will introduce spin techniques, smashes and flicks. In other words, you'll begin to become more intimate and connected than during the warm-up phase. You'll also discover whether you're well-matched playing partners or not.

Interpersonal skills mirror the above. Once you've reached a certain depth of conversation through mutual self-disclosure, it'll become quickly clear whether the two of you can develop into friends.

You'll instinctively make this decision based on how the other person's beliefs, values and social status (for example) compare to yours. This is known as the Social Comparison Theory.((Psychology Today: Social Comparison Theory))

Practice as You Go

Self-disclosure is not the easiest thing to do. Sometimes it takes courage to step out of your comfort zone. However, the results are well worth the effort. You'll build friendships quicker and easier. You'll also know when a friendship could move into a deeper, long-term relationship. (Both romantic and platonic.)

I've given you a lot of information in this article. And to help you remember and to act on the main takeaways, I've listed them below:

- Self-disclosure in conversation is reciprocal.
- Gradually introduce deeper levels of self-disclosure as you get to know someone.
- Decide on 'matchability' by listening to the beliefs, interests and values others disclose to you.
- Be willing to adapt your conversation and level of self-disclosure to match the person you're talking with.

Ultimately, self-disclosure becomes natural when we have an intimate friendship or relationship with someone. We want to tell them our hopes and dreams - and we want to listen to theirs too.

So, next time you're short of things to say to a new acquaintance, let self-disclosure lead the way.

The One Rule to Keep Every Conversation Going Naturally

How often are you speaking to someone new, feeling like the conversation's going pretty well, and then...
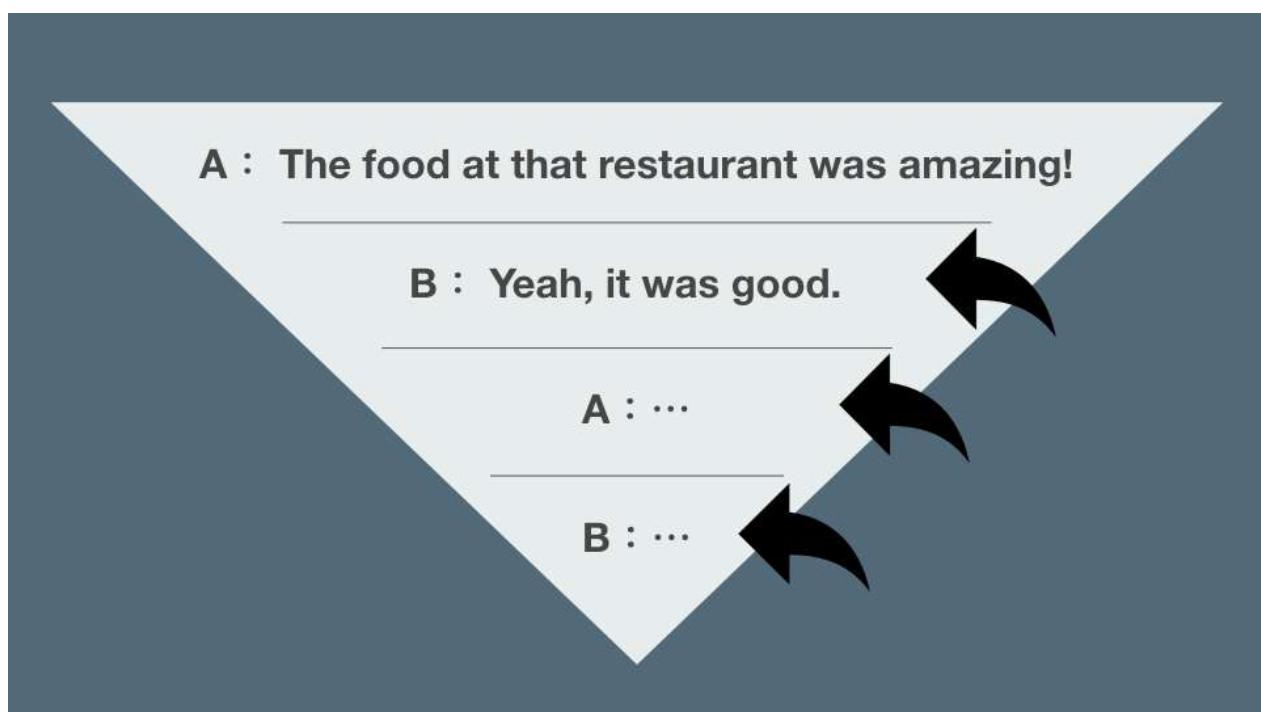
Silence hits. You don't know what to say. They don't know what to say. This is *so* awkward. What do you do?

Luckily, there's one simple rule that can keep every conversation flowing naturally, no matter who you're speaking to.

Whatever you say, make sure 30% of it is new information.

No conversation will last long with the same information being repeated over and over - it gets boring, and there's no new stimulation.

When you don't add new information, the conversation becomes like an inverted pyramid. The more you talk, the less information is exchanged. By using the 30% rule, both you and your friend will be learning new things all the time, keeping the conversation fresh and interesting.

Example #1

Friend: "The food at that restaurant was amazing!"

What you shouldn't say: "Yeah, it was good."

What you should say: "It was - I especially liked the way they seasoned their fries. It reminded me of another place I visited last week... (continue by adding info on the other restaurant).

Example #2

Friend: "That test was WAY too difficult, I'm sure I failed."

What you shouldn't say: "True, it was pretty hard."

What you should say: "You're right, which question did you find the hardest? The essay on language wasn't too bad, I wrote about... (talk about how you answered the question).

Why only 30% new information?

If you add too much new information, the conversation can easily become one-sided. The person you're speaking to might feel like you're not listening to them, you're simply reciting lots of things you know - and that's a more of a lecture than a conversation!

The two things you need for the 30% rule to work.

Both people need to be interested in continuing the conversation.

If the person you're speaking to has somewhere to be, is getting tired, or just doesn't feel like talking, this rule probably won't work. That's okay - just carry on the conversation at another time, when you both feel like chatting.

The current topic can't be expanded on.

Not every topic offers lots of opportunity for you to add new information. If someone says something like,"That banana was tasty," you might feel there's not much to add. In this case, simply acknowledge what the other person said and then bring up a new topic, one that has more room for discussion.

When You Have Nothing To Say, Let Others Talk

Whether we're a die-hard introvert or an extravagant extrovert, there will always be those strange and awkward moments in a conversation where we struggle to know what to say.

The feeling of panic can arise as we desperately search for the right words yet this usually causes that mental block of appropriate topics to talk about.

So why exactly does this happen? Well it has a tendency to happen when we aren't so familiar with a certain person or group of people. When you're thrown into a conversation before common ground has been found, it can be difficult to keep the interaction going in a smooth and natural way because we're not entirely confident of what and what not to talk about.

How to Keep a Conversation Going With Someone You're Unfamiliar With

Having a few good techniques under your belt is essential for these exact moments. It will not only help you socially, allowing you to forge better building blocks for potential friendships, but also in professional connections where networking is important.

Don't Make 'Being Interesting' Your Goal

Many people believe that for people to want to build some kind of relationship, they must win them over with interesting or humorous chat. In reality, this isn't really the case. **The interaction doesn't have to be insightful for it to be meaningful.** Don't get caught up in the belief that what you have to say isn't good enough - just say it anyway.

People generally don't remember what has been said in any given conversation, just that an interaction has taken place. Don't get hung up on impressing them, just be yourself.

Let Them Talk about Themselves by Asking Good Questions

People generally like to talk about themselves. Not because they're egotistical but because it's a safe topic and one they obviously know very well. Therefore, if you're struggling to think of what to say simply ask good questions.

Asking questions shows a level of personal interest and causes the other person to feel cared for. You do this by paying attention and observing the person to find clues. For example, if they look particularly tired, ask them what they did yesterday. If they have a certain item of clothing, mention you've been looking for a similar item and ask where they got it from or can they recommend where you can get one.

The key is to ask open-ended questions and get them talking rather than questions that elicit yes or no answers. This allows the person to elaborate more, keep the conversation going and helps you find more clues to their personality.

Have a Conversation About Food

The point of this is to find a universal topic. Not everyone knows about the latest technological advances or fashions but you know everyone has a passion or at least an opinion on food.

If you're eating together it's an easy way to start a conversation by simply commenting on the food. Or expand by talking about different cuisines or other foods you've tried. If you're eating a meal later, asking or suggesting what you should eat will always be a successful topic.

It's all about finding that common ground and food is a perfectly simple and universal topic to bring up.

Simply Rephrase What They Say

Sometimes conversations can wane if you can't really relate to the topic they're talking about. If you have little knowledge on the subject it can be hard to add your opinions and awkward silences can ensue.

A good technique in this case, is to rephrase what the other person has said. Not only does this show you're interested and listening to what they're saying, but it gives them a chance to point out discrepancies or be eager to tell you more because of your interest. If someone is describing their complicated job to you or a profession you're not familiar with they may be well aware of your lack of knowledge. By repeating what they say or asking for clarification, you're creating a sense of interest and rapport.

Share Small Things About Yourself

Sharing things about yourself can seem unnatural to some - especially introverts. However, sharing small things no matter how insignificant will not only show the other person you want them to get to know you, but it's an easy conversation filler.

As mentioned before, it's really not about what's being said in a conversation that people remember. **A person is more likely to remember the feeling of an awkward silence with you over a seemingly meaningless conversation about what you ate yesterday or what new gadget you bought.**

The idea is to be confident in bringing up any topic. If you do sense awkwardness, the other person will be more than grateful for your effort in keeping the conversation going so don't think too much about how you're coming across with your words.

Knowing it 'All' Doesn't Make Someone a Great Conversationalist

Always keep this in mind. While having a breadth of knowledge can make it easier to converse with different types of people, it's not necessary.

Know-it-alls do have a tendency to dominate conversations which we all know can turn people off. You'll be much better off turning your knowledge to the tips above and applying these fundamental rules to the conversations you have. Remember you're looking for flow and connection in a simple way. Don't overthink it.

The Real Reason Why A Person Is Boring

I have interviewed over 100 people for a number of positions. It's always exciting to talk with driven candidates, but sometimes I will admit that I have to fight the urge to yawn during an interview.

The last thing that you want to do at an interview or at a social event is lull your audience to sleep. Regardless of context, when I'm getting to know someone, I want to hear stories about different aspects of the person's life. I want to know what is happening with them so that I can understand how they face adversity and measure their own success.

Sometimes I walk away from a conversation feeling completely bowled over by a person's personality and accomplishments. Other times, the interaction has little impact, and I have trouble remembering the individual later. Nobody wants to be the forgettable person at the party or the lackluster job candidate.

You don't have to go on wild adventures all the time to be interesting

After interviewing so many people, I have a good sense of how monotony manifests itself. If a person is sitting in my office, I already know that he or she is qualified. I need to know more about the human being that did all the things on that CV.

What holds true for the most interesting job candidates also holds true in life. When you meet a new person, are you drawn to someone who lists off accomplishments with no back-story, or are you moved by their unique perspective? You don't have to go on wild adventures all the time to be interesting, but your attitude about taking on challenges and meeting new people can influence how others perceive you.

People who are willing to work hard to overcome obstacles almost always stand out when compared to people who are always trying to play it safe.

The five yawn-inducing people you don't want to be

If you want to be a memorable person there are a few things that you should avoid at all costs. Based on my life experience and time as an interviewer, if a person demonstrates any one of these attributes, I am not likely to see out additional interactions with them.

1. The individual who can't take social cues.

Unless you have a disorder that affects your ability to interact with others socially, you should have a basic grasp of social cues. People who can't read a crowd are boring, and they don't even notice it. They see their audience yawning, shifting in their seats, and glancing at their watches, and it doesn't register that those people want to leave.

Even the most interesting people slip into a tedious tale once in a while, but if they're paying attention to others' reactions, they'll adjust what they are saying, shorten their story, or rekindle interest.

I knew an individual in college who was terrible at reading her fellow students' cues. People avoided being around her because she told lengthy stories while disregarding others' class schedules. She'd continue talking even as her audience inched toward the exit. She was the sweetest person, but because she didn't pay attention to her peers' cues that they needed to leave, many people considered her to be boring.

A boring person will drone on until they've run out of things to say, which is usually well beyond the point when their audience has tuned out.

2. Someone too worried about what other people think.

It's natural to want to project a positive image that showcases your confidence and competence, but someone who cares too much about how other people view him or her is bound to be a people-pleaser. People-pleasers come off as boring because their fear of offending others prevents them from expressing themselves.

Having no strong opinion about anything is downright dull, and in a work setting, it can lead teams into disastrous situations.((Forbes: How To Be More Interesting (In 10 Simple Steps))) If you ask for an opinion and the answer you always get is, "I think that's great," "Whatever you think," or, "That seems okay," then you can't grow your idea. **The people-pleaser's input is useless.**

The most interesting people are willing to put forth their opinions--even if their ideas are different from the people around them. Being your authentic self requires vulnerability. ((Forbes: Brene Brown: How Vulnerability Can Make Our Lives Better)) You can easily spot the person who wants to avoid making waves because they'll always defer to your opinion or refuse to state their own.

When we have meaningful conversations, we can take projects and conversations in exciting new directions. It is possible to be kind and professional while disagreeing with someone. Sharing leads to growth, but pandering leads to stagnation.

3. The person with the persistently negative attitude

This may be my pet peeve. While it is acceptable to complain when something isn't going well, grumbling should not be a person's default setting. Constant complaining without working to find a solution is tiresome.((Forbes: 14 Bad Habits That Can Cost You Your Job)) Individuals who do this are more invested in expressing their feelings than they are in fixing the problem.

Whining about problems is easy, but taking action requires effort and change. People who aren't willing to work to improve their situation are scared to move forward. Complaining allows them to vent, but it keeps them well within their comfort zone. There's nothing less interesting than watching someone remain trapped by their own negativity.

I had an acquaintance who fell into this negativity trap. I tried to help her problem-solve, but she would always reply with, "Oh that will never work," or "I can't do that." It seemed like no matter how many ways I tried to help this person with her growing list of issues, she refused to help herself. Eventually I became frustrated with her unwillingness to work toward a solution, and I stopped interacting with her.

4. Everyone is boring other than himself

This is a subtle form of narcissism that I've seen a number of times during interviews. A whopping 55% of hiring managers agree that seeming disinterested during an interview is grounds for rejection.((Career Builder: Top 10 Things Not To Do In An Interview)) People who can't take an interest in others often don't like new experiences, and they aren't willing to make connections.

You may have met this person before. This is the person at the party who doesn't mind holding court and telling their own stories, but their eyes glaze over whenever anyone else starts to talk. They get bored quickly if the conversation isn't aimed toward something they like.

Memorable people work to connect with others, and connecting involves being willing to speak *and* listen.

5. Someone who put stability as their first priority

Some people are happy to stay in their bubble and stagnate. They don't desire change, and they fear new things.

You'll catch these people avoid meeting new people or breaking from their routine. They tend to make excuses and say things like, "This is too much for me," "I don't think I will like it," and "I'm good at what I'm doing." Knowing when to say no is an important part of living a

balanced life, but people who refuse every opportunity may be more interested in avoiding fear than leading an exciting existence.

People who won't try anything new have created a prison for themselves. Their unwillingness to be exposed to novel situations leads them to a comfortable but mediocre existence. They talk about a few topics all the time, or repeat a handful of stories because there simply isn't much going on with them.

Break out of your comfort zone and bamboozle us with your greatness.

You don't have to be a social butterfly or a daredevil to be an interesting person, but you do need to be open to what the world has to offer. If you show no interest in anything, and everyone seems boring to you, it might be time to look in the mirror and decide if the world is boring or if you need to make a change.

> *There's no growth in the comfort zone, and no comfort in the growth zone.* -Unknown

The Perk of Having a Sense of Humor

Do you ever find yourself in a room full of people laughing at something someone said, only to realize you're the only one apparently not in on the joke? It's an interesting problem to have, and one not many people are aware of.

I've always been a smart-alec, it's just in my blood. But I've definitely felt weird before when I say something clever and everyone laughs except one person. Did I offend them? Did they just not get the joke? Sometimes it could be that person doesn't have a sense of humor.

Maybe you don't find people to be all that funny. That's okay. But studies have shown that having a sense of humor and laughing often can extend your lifespan. In fact, having a good sense of humor increases your chances of reaching retirement age. But after 70, those benefits can decrease. So until then, get to chuckling!((Science Daily: A sense of humor helps keep you healthy until retirement age))

Laughter really is the best medicine!

It turns out that old cliche is an accurate one! In fact, learning to laugh more and loosen up can actually alleviate stress. Letting go of anger through laughter can help you release all that pent up anxiety and help you to be more balanced. This doesn't just mean laughing at other people's lame jokes or forcing yourself to smile when someone says something they deem witty; it also means laughing at yourself.

In today's world it can be so challenging to just let things roll off our backs and keep our heads up. But learning to laugh at our own mistakes can go a long way in helping us in our happiness.((Don Connelly: Learn to Laugh at Yourself when It Is Called for)) When I feel stressed, I like to find a good pun, like this one:

When you laugh at yourself, you radiate positivity.

In 2011, a study was conducted to determine if laughing at ones self impacted character perception. Sixty-seven undergrads decided to rate their ability to laugh at themselves and had a couple witnesses come up with their own ratings. The undergrads essentially tricked the witnesses, as they took pictures of them as they filled out a questionnaire. The participants were shown numerous pictures later, including their own which had been wildly distorted and stretched. The photos were so distorted, in fact, that the participants didn't

recognize their own faces. While they rated the photos in terms of humor, they were filmed so the researchers could analyze their reactions to determine genuine happiness and smiles.((Research Digest: The first ever experimental investigation of laughing at oneself))

Although 80 percent of participants flashed a genuine smile at least once on seeing their own distorted image, it was those who claimed to be able to laugh at themselves, and whose peers agreed with this verdict, who showed more frequent and intense smiling and laughter in response to the distorted self-images, and fewer signs of fake smiles or negative emotion.

While no real correlation was determined between the ability to laugh at ones self and the amount of laughter triggered by the funny images of other peoples' faces, there does seem to be evidence that proclivity for laughing at ones self really is a distinctive trait. So basically, don't be so hard on yourself! You'll like yourself more and be more enjoyable to others!

There are actually many types of humor.

Laugh-at-life humor. So far, we've really focused on the ability to laugh at yourself and at life. This is a specific type of humor that is usually related to not taking life too seriously. If you have this kind of humor, you probably know when to take a deep breath and let stress and anxiety melt away. There's also a good chance you're the friend people turn to for some positivity and motivation. ((Lauren Ware: The 10 Different Types of Humor))

Sarcastic humor: This is me. 100%. And if you're also sarcastic, you have a dark, biting sense of humor and you've probably been told before that someone found you offensive. Sarcasm is usually associated with being quick-witted, and that can make it dangerous to speak without thinking. When people understand your brand of comedy, you're golden. But when it comes to getting to know people, or wording an important work email, think before you speak/type.

Self-deprecating humor: This is a lot like laugh-at-life humor, but you're basically always the root of the joke. You like to be the class clown, but too much of it can make people a little uncomfortable. There's a line between dark and funny and dark and depressing.

The giggles: A case of the giggles is typically suffered by kids and teens, but adults can certainly find themselves wheezing with laughter. Usually this is caused when something is so funny in a trifling way that you laugh and just can't stop! This tends to happen to me pretty regularly, and I'm often the only person who thinks it's as funny as it is!((Psy Central: 7 Kinds of Humor and What They Mean))

Highbrow/witty humor: I love having conversations with people who have this brand of wit. Basically, your jokes show intelligence. You catch on to the subtle allusions in movies and books and you're careful to be witty but not a know-it-all.

Bathroom humor: If you're anything like me, you have a friend who sends you the poop emoji way too often. That friend has bathroom humor! If it's gross, gory or mildly taboo, they think it's the funniest thing they've ever heard. While these kinds of jokes can be hysterical, there's a time and a place for crude jokes. Take it easy.

Jokes at others' expense: You like to pick, prod and tease other people. This kind of humor walks a very fine line. After all, saying something bordeline cruel isn't okay just because you say, "I'm kidding!" afterward. It's okay to be sarcastic and give a friend a hard time, but make sure it's not going to hurt them emotionally.

Healing humor: This one's important. This is the kind of laughter that is *shared with* someone, not aimed at them. When we laugh with others, we release frustration and stress. This can be a transformative experience and so very healing.

Dry humor: This is one of my favorite types of humor, and I am so envious of those that have perfected it. Dry humor means having the ability to say something outrageous and funny but in an expressionless, matter-of-fact kind of way.

Everyone has their own brand of humor, you just have to find it.

Unfortunately, you can't just develop a sense of humor overnight, but luckily there's a good chance you already have one. You may just not know how to allow yourself to laugh. Once you've determined what your brand of humor is, or at the very least believe you *think* you know what you want it to be, the tips below can help you grow your funny bone and get you giggling.

- **Laugh at others, but not in a hurtful way**. When you laugh at something, it can sometimes be a domino effect. Allow yourself to laugh at any and everything you want, just avoid cruelty.

- **Actively look for jokes every day!** I know, I know, it sounds like a lot of work, but it doesn't have to be. So much humor is all around you if you're only willing to look for it. If you can force yourself to be actively aware of all the silliness you encounter 24/7, soon you will be able to laugh passively.

- **Recognize the difference between being funny and having a sense of humor.** If you're funny, you can express humor. But if you have a sense of humor, you can laugh with others, too!

- **Take cues from those around you.** What makes your family laugh? Your best friend? Try watching moves with all kinds of different humor to determine what makes you smile and laugh. And remember, the idea is to learn from people, not copy them.

- **Practice self-love.** If you love yourself, you'll be able to joke at yourself. Good-humored individuals embrace all their faults, and even openly laugh about them. If you can accept yourself for all the good and the bad, you're that much closer to having a great sense of humor.
- **Stay Healthy.** Humor is beneficial both physically and emotionally. If you develop a better understanding of humor, you'll be better at coping at everything from dealing with pain to easing your own stress. Giggling can actually stimulate organs and improve your immune system. Again, it really is the best medicine!

It's Difficult to Undo a First Impression, but It's Possible

Ah, first impressions. The one thing we can all agree to be nerve-racking. Whether meeting your significant other's best friend or your potential new boss, we all have experienced the desire to give an excellent first impression. And undoubtedly, we have all experienced the disappointment that comes from failing to do so.

We all know the basics of an introduction. If it's for a job, you stay true to yourself while also being extremely professional and confident. If it's to meet someone in your social life, you may want to appear witty and confidant (without trying too hard). But when you have an off day, or just don't know how to ace the first impression to begin with...what do you do?

First impressions can be very influential

While it can feel embarrassing to miss the mark of a good first impression, depending on the situation, it can also come with some pretty serious consequences. For instance, if the poor first impression happened in an important job interview, you definitely won't be getting an offer. It doesn't matter to the company that *you* know you were having an off day and *you* know you would be perfect for the position.

If you miss the shot, here's what you should do to bounce back

Even though giving a bad first impression can feel like the end of the world, there are things you can do to reverse the negative outcome and give the impression you meant to all along. The following tips should be studied and kept in the back of your mind for use at any given moment.

Decide if it needs a do-over at all

When we feel like someone didn't see us for the *real us* or generally wasn't too fond of us, we can be tempted to go out of our way to change their impression. But sometimes it's not worth worrying about in the first place. So before you put your foot in your mouth trying to

convince someone they should really like you or give you a second chance, assess the situation once you've calmed down and see if it's worth the stress. ((Inc: 9 Ways to Fix a Bad First Impression))

Stick to them like glue

If you want someone to pay attention to you, regardless of their first impression of you, it's important to create situations where the person relies on you to help them succeed. Identify opportunities for collaboration, even if you feel a little awkward. Psychologist Heidi Grant Halvorson says, "It's natural to shy away from people who don't think highly of you. But you need to fight that instinct and instead stick to them like glue if you hope to correct their misperceptions."

Remind them of the importance of fairness

This tip is a little gutsy, but if you do it right, you'll have a second chance in no time. A recent study found when people aspire to fairness, or have even been asked to consider it, they tend to inhibit some biases like gender stereotypes. To use this in your favor, comment on how the ability to judge someone accurately is a key skill for everyone to have. The subtle comment causes the listener to consider whether or not they have misjudged you.((Business Insider: 5 psychological strategies to reverse a bad first impression))

Apologize, but don't over-apologize

If you know exactly why you didn't come across as your usual charming self, accept it and be honest about it. Simply apologize for the misstep and move on. But don't feel the need to suddenly apologize profusely. It can make the person you're apologizing to feel they need to constantly reassure you. And no one likes that.

Recover quickly

When it comes to making up for a bad first impression, a great action to take is to turn right around and show a different side of your personality that's a little easier to like. If you made a joke that wound up being a little off-color, then recover by demonstrating sincerity. Or if you tried to seem sincere and it came off a little fake, demonstrate compassion.((The Art of Manliness: How to Recover From a Bad First Impression))

Be aware of how you are perceived

Self-awareness is key to success, no matter what we're talking about. But when it comes to first impressions, it's just as important. If you are a very shy person, and you know that about yourself, be aware of how it could seem to people who are judging you for the first time. In social situations, it could make you seem cold, even thought you're actually incredibly uncomfortable. So change up your body language to appear more open, no matter how quiet you may be, and don't be afraid to ask easy questions like, "where are you from?," "what do you do for a living?," etc.((Real Simple: How to Bounce Back From a Bad First Impression))

Wait it out, look for the best time to explain yourself

Timing is key. When it comes to wanting to undo a bad first impression, you may be overzealous in your attempt to fix the problem. However, that could make it look like you're coming off too strong or you're a pushy person. Instead, wait it out. One of my very best friends started out as someone I couldn't stand. My first impression of her was that she was whiney and entitled. About a year later, we met again under different circumstances and began chatting. She was able to explain to me what was going on in her life that led me to have that impression of her, and it gave us the opportunity to talk without any bias. We're so close in fact, that she's one of my bridesmaids. But if she had been too pushy about making sure I liked her right after we first met, I probably wouldn't have given her the time of day. ((Harvard Business Review: 4 Ways to Overcome a Bad First Impression))

Give them new context about your life

In 2015, a study conducted by Cornell University found it was possible to change someone's impression of you just by giving information that puts your actions in a new light. The study involved telling participants about a man who broke into a house and took precious objects. Obviously the participants disliked the man. Even when told the same man had once saved a baby's life, the participants judged him still. However, the precious items the man took were two children, and he broke into the home because it was burning down! Changing the context completely changed the perception the participants had on the man. So if you can find a way to show your initial actions were well-intentioned, you can usually change that bad first impression to a good one.

So what do you think? Do you feel more capable of ensuring that person you just met likes you? Perception is so important, but it's often hard to read. So remember to assess the situation thoroughly before going out of you way to redo the initial impression. After all, that's your first impression of the other person, too; they may feel just as embarrassed as you do!

So be self-aware and know when to take action and when to let things go for a while. Sometimes second chances occur naturally, and other times you need to work for them. No matter which it is, remember the tips in this article and you're sure to leave a great impression next time.

Dealing With Embarrassment in Life

Think back to when you were at school. Most of the time, you probably enjoyed learning new things and having fun with your friends.

However, you almost certainly encountered some cringeworthy, embarrassing moments.

Like the time when a teacher asked you a simple question in front of the class - but you answered it wrongly. Your classmates began sniggering, before quickly shifting to uncontrollable laughter! Despite the teacher telling them to be quiet, the damage was done. You made yourself look like a fool in front of your class. And your obvious embarrassment was written all over your face.

On an subconscious level, this frightful experience is likely to be still impacting you today.

Most of the embarrassing moments that plague our lives fall into six categories.

In Lesley A. Withers's book *Embarrassment: The Communication of an Awkward Actor Anticipating a Negative Evaluation*, he talks about these categories of embarrassing moments:

1. Privacy. You're getting changed in your bedroom when someone opens the door without knowing you are there. As you're only half dressed - you're hugely embarrassed by the incident.

2. Lack of knowledge and skill. You're feeling confident that your interview for a dream job is going well. Suddenly, however, you've been posed a question about a skill you've listed on your resume. The interviewer knows a lot about the skill, and it's clear that you don't!

3. Criticism and rejection. You've gone to your local bank to see if you can arrange a car loan. The adviser spends a long time collating your financial details and asking you questions about your intended car purchase. After 30 minutes with you, the adviser says that everything looks okay, but she just needs to run a credit check. It was all going well until then. Unfortunately, the credit check reveals that you're not entitled to a loan from the bank. You feel defeated and embarrassed.

4. Awkward acts. Your friend has just bought a new apartment, and they've asked you to come along to their housewarming party. You turn up with a bottle of wine and some chocolates. The party is going great until disaster strikes... You've knocked over your glass

of red wine, and it's spilled all over the pure white carpet. Awkward, for sure!

5. Appropriate image. You've been invited to a theatre show by some work colleagues. You casually agreed to go, without paying too much attention to what the show was all about. On show day, you agree to meet your colleagues outside the theater. You're running a little late, but that's not the worst of it. When you arrive, you immediately see that everyone is dressed formally - and you're in jeans and T-shirt. (That's the last time you went to the opera!)

6. Environment. You're a teenager. And you're watching a movie at home with your parents. Between the drama and the action, the movie is proving to be a compelling watch. However... out of the blue, a graphic 'adult' scene begins to take place. It's not just you that's embarrassed by this - your parents clearly are too!

Have you noticed that embarrassment hits most of us hard, but some people seem much more resilient?

I'm sure you've seen it happen. A young waiter is carrying several plates of food, but unfortunately trips and falls. The food goes everywhere, and the plates are smashed to smithereens. What could be more embarrassing than this? However, he looks completely unruffled by the incident, and instead, begins to calmly clean up the mess from the floor.

Impressive, for sure.

People who appear immune to embarrassment have a different mental outlook to most of us.

Firstly, they tend to be very self-confident people, who don't easily feel shame or humiliation. They have powerful self-belief, and don't allow themselves to be knocked down for long.

Secondly, they have a different perspective on mistakes. While you may regard mistakes as a bad thing, the 'embarrassment-immune' minority sees mistakes as vital learning cues.

So, how can you become more like the above people?

Let's start with the everyday embarrassing moments we all face and how we can tackle them.

Here are some of the most common embarrassing moments, and the best ways you can handle them.

Having your debit/credit card declined at a store...

It's horrifying. You feel that you've been immediately judged by the people in the store.

Counteract this by looking and sounding confident, and saying something along the lines of: "My mistake, that card has actually expired. Here, please use this valid one."

Falling on a treadmill...

This is both dangerous to your physical body - and to your ego!

If you're unfortunate to fall while using a treadmill, firstly, be sure to check that you're not physically injured. If you're okay, then you might want to make a joke about the incident with other gym members. You could say: "I think I was too quick for the treadmill!"

Asking if someone is pregnant - when they're not...

This has happened to several of my colleagues and friends. They thought someone was pregnant, when really they had just put on weight (especially around the stomach area).

This scenario is humiliating for the person being asked, and hugely embarrassing for the person doing the asking.

My recommendation is to profusely apologize to the person in question, and then explain that you thought you'd heard that she was pregnant. Something like: "Oh, I'm sorry. The gossip in the office was that you were expecting. I'll make sure the gossip stops."

Listening to your stomach making groaning noises while you're in a quiet meeting...

This happened to me. I'd skipped breakfast and was existing purely on coffee. However, my stomach clearly was expecting something more. I went into a meeting that was quiet (bordering on silent), and my stomach decided to make an appearance. Despite my best efforts, the groaning became louder and louder. Let's just say, that I was relieved when the meeting was finally over!

This scenario can be dealt with in several ways.

Firstly, make sure that before going into a quiet zone (church, meeting, theater, etc.) that you've eaten a decent amount of food. Secondly, if your stomach has begun to make noises, you could choose to excuse yourself from the gathering and then quickly eat something. Lastly, if the noise from your stomach is not too bad, you could apologize to those around you by saying: "Sorry, I didn't realize I was so hungry."

Failing to open a door correctly...

I'm sure you've done this. Pulling a door when it should be pushed - or pushing a door when it should be pulled. It's always a little embarrassing to do this, even though it happens frequently to most of us.

I've discovered a trick that prevents me from making this mistake. Before opening a door, I have a quick glance at the hinges at the top of the door. In most cases, this reveals which way the door opens.

However, if you still fail to open a door correctly, then redirect the attention away from you, by saying: "This door should really be marked with push and pull signs."

Realizing that you have coffee stains on your pants...

This happens to all of us from time to time. It can be coffee, tea or even chocolate. But the results are the same, an embarrassing stain on your pants - that you may not have even known about.

Practical ways to resolve this include changing your pants, or attempting to wipe off the offending stain.

From a psychological point of view, try to see this episode as nothing more than a humorous incident. It can be embarrassing - but it can also be funny. It's purely dependent on your perspective. To make people laugh about it, say something like: "I might have to start wearing nappies again!"

Discovering that your phone is not on silent during an interview...

I remember my brother telling me a story about someone who interviewed at his company. The interviewee not only forgot to put his phone on silent - but actually took the call during the interview. He proceeded to speak with the caller for several minutes... while the interviewers looked on in amazement.

This guy wasn't embarrassed (but he should have been!), but for most ordinary folks, a cellphone ringing during an interview is a nightmare scenario. It can make you look bad, and instantly knock your confidence.

Deal with this situation by always double-checking that your phone is on silent. If necessary, turn off your phone completely.

If the worst happens, then you need to move into *damage limitation* mode. You could apologize by saying: "I'm so sorry about that. I was sure I had put my phone on silent, but it appears that I was mistaken."

Forgetting someone's name when introducing them...

Have you experienced this issue in your life before? Unless you have a super-powered memory, then I'm sure you have.

If you can't remember someone's name when introducing them, then you have a couple of choices. You could say: "This is a colleague of mine from the Finance Department." Alternatively, you could apologize for your memory loss, and say: "I'm sorry, I've forgotten your name - can you remind me please?"

Deal with any potential embarrassment by not allowing your memory loss to destroy your self-confidence. You can also put the incident into perspective. (Forgetting a name is a relatively trivial matter.)

Finding out that your shirt is covered in sweat patches...

The air conditioning in your office can't handle the heat on a particularly hot day. Despite applying your usual antiperspirant, you've started to sweat profusely - and it's now showing through your shirt.

This can definitely be embarrassing, as personal hygiene is expected in modern society.

What to do? Well, if you're lucky enough to have a spare shirt, then you could change into this. You could also go home early, if homeworking is an option.

If you have to stay in the office with your sweat-stained shirt, then you'll need to deal with it. Do this by stating to others that the office is so hot that it's started to make you sweat (i.e., this is not a personal problem). You could say: "Crikey! It's incredibly hot in here. I hardly ever sweat, but right now I'm feeling the effects of the heat."

Choking on your food...

Picture going on a first date. You've spent several hours showering and grooming yourself. (You want to look and smell great.) You meet your prospective partner at the chosen restaurant, and both of you relax into some friendly conversation. Your food order arrives, and you take your first few bites... It could be nervousness or stress, but either way, the food goes down the wrong pipe - and you find yourself choking!

Definitely not the best look on a first date.

You could avoid this by making sure that you're as relaxed as possible during the meal. You could even take smaller bites, and chew for longer than usual.

If it's happened, and you're choking on your food, the first thing is to clear the blockage. Once this is resolved, you need to find a way to overcome the embarrassment. Do this by making a joke of the incident: "That'll teach me for being greedy!"

Embarrassing moments are waiting in the wings to spring upon you at the most unexpected times. However, once you begin to practice the tried and tested ways of dealing with embarrassment, then you'll no longer fear these situations.

Empathy vs Sympathy

Several years ago I went through a gut-wrenching break-up. It was traumatic, painful and devastating. The one bright spot amidst the tears and heartache was the understanding, devotion and genuine care displayed by my family and friends as I went through the healing process. It meant the world to me.

Several months later one of my family members fell ill. Once again I turned to my support system. This time, however, their response was a bit different. It wasn't that they didn't care per se, they expressed their feelings a bit differently. I sensed that they couldn't quite feel where I was coming from. They seem to be more understanding and emotionally supportive during my break up. Their lukewarm and slightly distant responses left me feeling angry, confused and hurt.

This experience taught me the difference between empathy and sympathy.

When one doesn't have similar experience, very likely he has sympathy rather than empathy

Once I was able to distance myself from the situations and view them a bit more objectively I realized a few important factors which helped explain the differences in the responses I received.

The first thing I learned is that when people have shared or similar experiences, it resonates with them more. During my break up I heard things like, "girl, I know how you feel," or "chile it ain't going to be easy, take as much time as you need to get over this," and "call me anytime you need to talk--day or night--and I'll be there to listen." These responses came from a place of knowing how I felt in the moment. These responses were sprinkled with kindness, concern and most important, empathy.

The second important thing I learned is that when it comes to experiences that are foreign to others, people tend to disassociate their feelings and lean towards providing advice. This type of response--while it can appear uncaring, cold and a bit callous, truly is birth out of a place of sincere compassion and sympathy.

And there in lies the difference between empathizing and sympathizing. Empathy is the ability to see the situation from the other person's perspective. It is the ability to stand in his or her shoes and endure the gut punch.

Sympathy, on the other hand, allows another person to see the situation through the lens of a spectator--similar to watching a movie. It is a place of distance and inexperience. It allows an individual to see the gut punch but not feel it. It leaves the spectator saying, "Man, that must have hurt. If I were them I would have..."

When a person is in pain, emotional support always trumps practical advice

The worse thing you can do during a time of turmoil is providing advice. Sure you mean well, but giving unsolicited advice is never a good idea. Nine times out of ten, when a person is in despair they want to feel heard and understood. As hard as it can be sometimes--simply listening to a person can be the most helpful and profoundly comforting thing you can do. When a person is in pain, emotional support always trumps practical advice.

Let's say your good friend loses their job and you've never experienced job loss or struggled with unemployment. Saying things like "at least you got your health," or " you've got money saved, you'll be alright..." won't help. They are accurate and your friend will bounce back, however, the true struggle may have nothing at all to do with money. He or she could be feeling betrayed, devalued, unappreciated and feel a loss of identity. Those responses don't address how the person is feeling.

Instead, listen first. Try to understand how they are feeling. Try to visualize it in your mind's eye--not how you would feel in the situation but try to imagine how they said they feel. Then and only then should you speak. And when you do, say things that address their concerns such as, "you put in so much time and energy into that job, I understand why you feel betrayed, " or "you're right, they should have at least given you a warning that the company was downsizing..."

If all else fails, just listening, wiping away tears and letting them know that you are here - no matter what they need...

Here are four ways to move from sympathizing to empathizing:

Find a way to relate to what they are experiencing

Try to establish some sort of common ground in your mind. In the example of a friend who've experienced job loss, try relating to their feelings of rejection. We've all experienced rejection in some form or another. Maybe you had a bad break up with your Ex. The situations are very different but the feelings are parallel. Draw on that experience to help you empathize with what they are feeling.

Practice finding commonalities with everyone you meet

Finding a way to relate to those around you not only makes you more empathetic it makes you more relatable. When you meet a new person, make it a practice to find at least three things you have in common with them.

Also, when people are sharing their experiences with you, work to engage your imagination and visualize what they are saying. Try injecting yourself into the situation and feeling what they felt. Doing this helps train your brain to move from a state of ego-centrism to being "other's" focused.

The Journal of Neuroscience((Psychology Today: The Neuroscience of Empathy)) published a study in which researchers found that the tendency to be egocentric is natural for human beings. However, researchers also found that a part of your brain recognizes the lack of empathy and corrects itself. According to the study:

> *"This specific part of your brain is called the the right supramarginal gyrus. When this brain region doesn't function properly—or when we have to make particularly quick decisions— researchers found one's ability for empathy is dramatically reduced. This area of the brain helps us to distinguish our own emotional state from that of other people and is responsible for empathy and compassion."*

Respond to feelings not words

When a wound is fresh and a person is angry and hurt they are also confused. This is why listening to understand is so paramount to producing an empathetic response. You have to listen with your ears, your eyes and most importantly your heart. You have to hear the subtext and what is not being said.

Parents, teachers, caregivers and anyone who works with children understand this concept. Kids--especially when they are very little--don't have the vocabulary to adequately express themselves. Adults have to assess the situation, interpret body language and facial expressions and in some way relate to what the child has experienced. The adult then responds to what the child is feeling in lieu of what they said.

Listen, Listen LISTEN

The key to comforting someone who is hurting is listening. You could have experienced the EXACT thing they are going through but you and your friend are unique individuals and see things differently. You may think you know how they feel because of how you feel but you can never be sure until they tell you.

You have to learn to fight the urge to jump in and say something. Even when the situation gets awkward and you feel something should be said. Fight the urge. Turn off your inner dialogue. Stop constructing your response. Listen to them.

They will tell you--through their words, tears and actions--exactly what they need. And if you are unsure what to do or say, asking the simple question, "what can I do to help" or what do you need from me," is better than assuming and doing the wrong thing.

Empathy requires more than merely putting yourself into someone else's position. It is the ability to imagine yourself as him in the exact situation he or she is in. You cannot empathize with an abstract. The experience must become concrete.

When done correctly, empathy leads to compassion which is suffering with someone in lieu of merely pitying them. True empathy says I share your emotions. Compassion, which is built from empathy, is the truest form of comfort we as humans can provide.

Meeting the Right Person at the Wrong Time

They say timing is everything. And "they" are right.

We live our lives striving to make perfect decisions. We are bombarded with information that tells us we are imperfect and that we must strive to attain success. Whether it's how our bodies and faces look and how we must retain our youth, despite the natural process of aging; how we dress; how much money we earn; where we live; what commodities and material possessions we can accumulate.

Popular culture tells us that we need to work very hard and use all the resources available to us to make sure we reach our fullest potential, the pinnacle of success and superiority. Nobody strives for being average, for doing just OK, or for simply being. So, when we think we have made the wrong decision, or missed out on something we believe we are entitled to, we feel a sense of loss that is hard to shake. This can apply to a job opportunity, or promotion, a property or commodity purchase, and even relationships. Meeting the right person at the wrong time can be life changing when it doesn't work out the way we desire. It can impact us for a long time to come, resurfacing ((Your Mental Wealth: Resolving Unfinished Business)) when we least expect it and preventing us from moving on.

When we meet the right person at the wrong time, we feel like missing out the good.

Psychologists refer to the grief of missing out, or "Fear Of Missing Out" most recently and commonly known as "FOMO", as dealing with "unfinished business". ((Evolution Counseling: Unfinished Business)) When all the factors don't come together to create the outcome we desire, for one reason or another, we don't get what we want and this creates feelings of loss, grief, regret and even hostility. Holding onto these feelings are the only connection we have to the elusive thing that has slipped through our fingers and so we focus on the negative feelings as a security blanket instead of letting go and moving on with our lives.

When we meet somebody who seems ideal, it is only natural to want to make that connection and to manifest a relationship with that person. Those feelings may even be reciprocated and we may even begin an intimate relationship. But if that seemingly right person comes along at the wrong time, for us or for them, the relationship is doomed to fail.

Although all the other boxes are ticked; attraction, values, life goals, geography; if the timing is off, neither party has any power over the course of the situation and the reality needs to be accepted.

It's harsh to accept, but meeting someone at the wrong time means he/she is the wrong person.

If you meet the right person at the wrong time, chances are they are in fact, the wrong person. The right person doesn't only need to fulfill the criteria of your desires and vice versa, if two people are heading in the wrong direction from each other, if one person is more ready than the other to settle down, or is dealing with their own unfinished business and hasn't got the capacity to maintain the needs of the relationship at that time, then it is inevitable that the relationship will end and resistance will make it end badly. Timing is everything, it is the one ingredient that ensures a relationship's longevity, prosperity and success.

Dealing with unfinished business when you think you have met the right person at the wrong time, in fact making them the wrong person, can be confronting and painful. The struggle((Viral Thread: 10 Struggles People Who've Met The Right Person At The Wrong Time Will Understand)) is real and you will experience a number of emotions that could leave you confused and depressed.

To move on and meet the right person, learn from the relationship with this wrong person.

The key to coping and moving forward involves not only communicating((PsychCentral:8 Steps to Finishing Unfinished Business)) with the person, to resolve the issues between you both and deal with the deterioration and cessation of the relationship, it also requires you both to do your own individual purging of feelings by confronting your grief, extracting the lessons and moving forward. Writing a letter((Relationship Realities: The Power of Unfinished Business)) to the person, regardless of whether they every read it or not, is one useful exercise to consider.

Here are some other ways to address unfinished business when we meet the right person at the wrong time:

Cherish the good memories, you don't have to forget them.

Like any great experience, good relationships are sometimes fleeting and just because they are not forever, doesn't mean they were any less meaningful. Sometimes having to let go of someone, makes your time with them even more significant, specifically because it was so short lived. Use your time reflecting on the good times instead of dwelling on the negatives and the fact that it had to end.

Don't lose your ideals, stay true with what you want.

When you meet the one you think may be the right person at the wrong time, it is tempting to change yourself and your goals, in order to fit into the criteria that you believe will preserve the relationship. You are setting yourself up to fail and eventually, the real you and your truest needs will re emerge and you will have done nothing except waste yours and the other person's time. The best thing you can do for yourself is to be true to yourself; your desires, your life goals and where you are at in your life. Despite what you think you are missing out on, if you remain authentic, you can't go wrong.

Feel the bitterness, this helps you to recover faster.

It is OK to be sad, angry, resentful, confused, even bitter. All feelings are valid and denying them only intensifies them. Life is all about ups and downs and the idea that it will always be smooth sailing is false and fabricated by the aforementioned manufactured ideals we get from popular culture. The times we feel most alive and connect deeply with our humanity is when we experience loss, which by the way is inevitable. It is the human condition to know and to feel and therefore to grieve. We want to protect ourselves from this pain and disappointment and to make the best possible decisions to avoid unnecessary hurt, but sometimes not everything is in our control and we only gain this information and the tools to make better decisions through bitter experience. Embrace it.

Be determined to walk away from what doesn't serve you.

Being willing and determined to walk away from something that we really want but can't have takes strength of character and emotional maturity. Unless you're a toddler, you need to develop the understanding that you can't have everything you want in life. Where's the challenge in that? It is simply counterproductive and in fact destructive to try to force a situation or a relationship when it isn't working out.

Meeting the right person at the wrong time is an opportunity to gain these life lessons and in time, most people tend to look back with hindsight and are able to appreciate the reasons why things evolved in the way they did. We can look back and see that although things didn't work out how we wanted them to at the time, they were better for us in the long run.

Finding Your Attachment Style

Ever heard of attachment theory? It's the theory that explains what kind of attachment we form in our adult relationships, particularly with our romantic partners.

Some relationships have compatible attachment styles. Others are not so lucky. When you end up dating somebody with a different attachment style, it can lead to all kinds of conflict in the relationship. One of these conflicts could be about time. For example, attachment theory explains that some people expect to spend all of their free time with their partners. Other people, however, neither want nor need to spend so much time with their partners. This difference can cause a struggle between two people as they try to agree on how much time to invest in the relationship.

Changing your attachment style is a long and difficult process.

You can definitely try to change your particular attachment style, but that's a really long and difficult process. According to attachment theory, we develop our attachment style when we are small children. It's usually based on the relationship we had with our parents.

Instead, we're going to talk about the different types of attachment styles and which combinations are better for relationships. If you can identify your exact attachment style, you can find a partner who fits your needs. This, of course, is the ideal situation. If you're already in a relationship, however, and your attachment combination isn't so good, don't worry! There's still hope for you and your significant other.

Four attachment styles.

Attachment theory identifies 4 types of attachment styles:

- **Secure** - You tend to feel secure and close to your partner, while still respecting each person's independence.
- **Insecure Anxious** - You tend to feel unhappy in your relationships and sometimes act possessive of your partner. You worry a lot that you will lose your significant other, who you depend on for your happiness.
- **Insecure Avoidant** - You tend to put distance between yourself and your partner, doing everything possible to avoid an emotional connection. Your partner may feel that you are not concerned with the relationship.

- **Insecure Disorganized** - You have difficulty trusting other people and experience a variety of fears, including: getting too close to your partner or being too distant. Your emotions tend to change quickly, which keeps you in a constant state of confusion.

Each attachment combination has a different outlook for the relationship.

Positive Outlook

If either person has a secure attachment style, then the relationship has a positive outlook. Attachment theory tells us that the person with a secure attachment style is able to validate their partner's concerns. They can even help their less secure partner overcome their insecurities.

Challenging Outlook

The anxious + anxious combination is challenging. People with this attachment style are able to read small changes in emotion and behavior. This perceptive ability combined with their anxious insecurity results in jumping to conclusions.((The-Love-Compass: Attachment Pairings: Find the Best Fit)) In short, two insecure anxious people have the potential to experience a relationship full of drama, jealousy, and arguments. The same happens for the insecure disorganized + insecure disorganized combination.

When an avoidant one pairs up with another avoidant one, there'll be little communication, which may seem to be fine at the beginning as both aren't demanding. But as time goes by the connection will become weaker and it's hard to sustain the relationship.

Toxic Combination

If the two attachment styles are anxious and avoidant, things are going to be difficult. You should probably mentally prepare yourself for the kind of issues that this combination might bring to your life. If you're thinking about getting into this romance, think again.

Interestingly, these two types of attachment are often drawn together. That's because they almost complement each other. An anxious person has fear of losing their partner and so they wait for the avoidant person to decide to commit to the relationship. This combination validates the avoidant person's behavior.((ArtOfWellbeing: 14 Things You Need to Know About Adult Attachment Theory))

As insecure disorganized style is a combination of the anxious type and the avoidant type, when the anxious side comes up, it'll be a disaster with the avoidant type. When the avoidant side comes up, conflicts will arise with the anxious type. That's why both insecure disorganized + insecure avoidant and insecure disorganized+ insecure anxious are not likely to work.

Be honest with yourself to identify your attachment style.

In order to find someone who fits your attachment style, you must first identify it. Think about the way you react to the things your partner does.

If they tell you they'll call at 6:00 pm and they don't call until 6:30 pm, do you spend that half hour worrying what could have possibly gone wrong? Do you start feeling vulnerable or thinking you've probably been abandoned? Be honest with yourself, you've probably been

known to pout or start arguments with your partner. Sound familiar? You're probably an insecure anxious type.

Think about how you feel after you spend a lot of time with your significant other. Do you need some time to yourself? Or maybe you feel like being in a long term relationship means you'll lose your identity or independence. If this sounds like you, you could be have an insecure avoidant attachment type.

Observe your partner's behavior to find out their attachment style.

It may seem more difficult to identify your significant other's attachment style, but it's not impossible. You might not know exactly how they feel internally, but you can observe their behaviors. Think about how they react to your concerns. If you've had a bad day and you come home talking about it, what do they say? Do you feel ignored, like they just aren't interested? They might have an insecure avoidant attachment style.

What happens when you're running late to a date? If they start sending texts after only 3 minutes to ask if you're still coming, they might be an anxious type.

No relationship is perfect and certainly no relationship is bound to fail just because of attachment styles. By understanding your person attachment style and that of your partner's, though, you can make real progress toward ensuring your future happiness together.

Speaking the Different Love Language

How do you express love? How do you want to be loved in a relationship? If you're like most of us, you fall into 1 of the 5 love language categories (with a couple strong influencers): ((Lifehack: Everyone Shows Love In A Different Way, Find Your Partner's Love Language))

- **Words of Affirmation**
  - Saying: "I love you", "You're amazing", and "I'm so lucky".
- **Acts of Service**
  - Actions speak louder than words.
- **Receiving Gifts**
  - Little tokens of love and affection make you smile all day.
- **Quality Time**
  - Time is valuable and you want to spend it with your significant other.
- **Physical Touch**
  - Hugging, cuddling, and holding hands is how you let the world know you're in love.

Now that you've identified your personal love language, what about your partner's? Is it the same or different? Do you know?

It may feel like you don't understand each other, but having different love languages is not the end of the world.

You've just spent your entire evening with your partner instead of reading that book you really wanted to get to. Despite that, they're upset you haven't kissed them in the last 4 hours. You just can't understand what more they want from you. Sounds familiar? Or you ask them why they never say, "I love you." They respond, "Don't you like it when I bring you chocolates?" And you can't see the connection.

The biggest problem with this is that your messages of love might not be understood by each other.((PsychCentral: Which Love Language Suits You and Your Partner?)) Don't worry! It's pretty normal to be with somebody who communicates love differently. Not everyone speaks the same love language.((Bustle: How to Cope When You and Your Partner Have Different Love Languages)) While it might be nice to have a partner that understands exactly what you need to feel loved, it isn't the end of the world if you don't. After all, we can't all be exactly the same, how can we?

You can speak different love languages and still have a healthy relationship.

For couples worried about their future together, here's some soothing relationship advice: You can have different love languages and still maintain a healthy relationship. The two of you just need to put in a little effort to understand your different needs. Understanding what your partner needs means you can make sure to give it to them.((HealingJourneyBlog: Different Love Languages Can Still Equal Happiness)) It's all about communication.

1. Get to know your partner's love language the easy way.

Start paying attention to the little things your partner says and does. What seems to make them happy? When do they start to feel unhappy or complain about the way things are going? Talking to each other about your romantic needs and wants is a huge and important step. It also takes time.

Or, just get together for a date night at home, make a few drinks, prepare a few snacks, and **take this online quiz.**

Be truthful and respond to the questions from your heart to get the most accurate answer. Taking the 5 love languages quiz will help both of you identify exactly what your love languages are in a matter of minutes. It also helps prevent any miscommunication or misunderstandings you might have while trying to figure it out on your own.

2. Learn to speak your partner's love language.

Once you identify your love languages, keep following the relationship advice of so many: learn to speak your partner's love language! Start showing love according to what they understand as love.((Huffingtonpost: Love Languages: Relationship Communication 101)) Sound easy? It's not the most difficult thi ng in the world, but it certainly isn't the easiest either.

You are literally learning to speak a new language. This means learning all the right things to say, how and when to say them, and learning what not to say. Here are some great pieces of relationship advice for what to do if you and your partner speak different love languages. ((FierceMarriage: How to Speak Your Spouse's Love Language: And What to Avoid))

- Acts of Service: Try doing little things to show them how much you care. Get their car washed, pack their lunch, and remember to return their book to the library.
- Quality Time: Put away the cell phone and give them your undivided attention. Take a weekend getaway or play a board game between just the two of you.
- Words of Affirmation: Remember to verbalize what you think. Show them your

appreciation, send random texts throughout the day, or send a handwritten note in their briefcase or backpack.

- Receiving Gifts: Bring them small things occasionally. Things like their favorite chapstick, a coffee from the local coffee shop, and good book are always welcome. Try to never forget special dates like birthdays and anniversaries!
- Physical Touch: Make an effort to reach out and hold their hand. Hug your significant other after you haven't seen each other all day and never forget good morning kisses.

3. Learn to communicate with your lover and compromise.

Relationship advice concerning how to learn your partner's love language is full of one word: compromise. Learning to compromise isn't easy, it's full of doubts and struggles. Why? Because compromising is about giving something up and who wants to do that? Anyone who wants their relationship to work, that's who.

Relationships are all about give and take. So, what do you do if your partner's love language is Physical Touch and you can't stand to hold hands for longer than 2 minutes? Well, you learn to hold hands, hug, and cuddle. You do this even though it makes you slightly uncomfortable because you care about expressing your love in a way your significant other will understand. It's not just about you giving in, though. For this compromising to work out, your partner is going to have to do the same. Is Quality Time your love language? Guess what? They're going to have to miss their favorite TV show or that all important championship game every once in a while to go out for a walk or have a conversation over a cup of coffee with you.

Remember this relationship advice: it's not impossible to be with somebody who has a different love language. It just means being more in tune with the special needs of your relationship and caring so much for the other person that you're willing to put in the extra effort.

A Lot of Relationship Experience Doesn't Equate to a Great Marriage

The old school romantic notion of marrying before sex is almost an antique relic. Fully 95% of Americans have had premarital sex. Most men will have had at least 6 relationships, and women 5 before tying the knot. What does all of this experience mean for marriage quality?

At the very least, divorces have been going down since the 1980's. Even though people continue to use the false "50% of marriages end in divorce" statistic, marriages have been improving for decades.

> Whenever the subject of marriage gets brought up, you can be sure that someone will argue against the institution by trotting out the most famous of famous statistics: half of marriages end in divorce. This seems like a slam dunk factoid as to why folks should avoid the altar. There's just one problem: it isn't true and hasn't been for awhile now. - Bret & Kate, The art of Manliness

This may not correlate to people getting more relationship experience, but it doesn't seem to be a negative. Let's jump into how a lasting relationship works, and whether or not more more experiences can mean healthier marriages.

They Key to a Lasting Relationship Is Personal Growth

Healthy relationships are not complicated, but people are. A lot of the mystique about healthy relationships has to do with focusing on the wrong things. Many people blame external sources for their failures and successes.

The first place to start a healthy relationship is by taking a good look at ourselves. When things are going wrong it's too easy to blame others. In relationships, two halves don't make a whole. Instead, two whole people compliment each other.

Whatever baggage we bring into our relationships is going to affect their longevity and quality. This is why a commitment to personal growth is so important. **The better we are, the better the people we'll attract, and the better our romances will be.**

This will affect how our relationship experiences play into a marriage. Better quality experiences will teach an observant person better lessons. For a better experience, work on yourself first.

A couple personal skills which can play into a relationship include:

- **Confidence:** The way you feel about yourself is going to have a direct effect on the people in your life. Overcoming shyness, building self esteem, and and having a healthy self image are crucial. You're less likely to stay in a bad relationship if you feel good about yourself.((Conquer &Win: How to overcome shyness & social anxiety to get social confidence))
- **Social skills:** Being able to read people and understanding the best way to get a message across are big. Without good people skills, it's hard to let others know how we feel and to understand how they feel. Learning how to positively influence others can help a long term relationship.

It's Not About Having More, It's About Learning Wisely

Does the number of relationships we have contribute to a better marriage? Yes and no.

Experience is how we learn. We can get good at almost anything by dedicating time and effort. We can also spend a lot of time doing something and still be horrible. Think bad drivers; many have been on the road for decades and still resemble go cart racers.

For relationship experience to count, we have to be active learners. It's not enough to simply have relationships. We have to be conscious observers and turn off the autopilot.

Some people learn from experiences and get better. Others learn bad behaviors and repeat them in every relationship. One disaster after another; dating narcissists, manipulators, and psychopaths doesn't help us.

To learn from a healthy relationship, **stay away from toxic people**. Chances are that if you keep ending up with toxic personalities, there's a lesson about your own personality that you're missing.

> "It's about the individual. Some people are ready to meet 'the one' right away; others need more relationships under their belt to learn what works and what doesn't." - Charlee Brotherton

More relationship experiences can be great if we learn lessons from those relationships. Often times those lessons are about ourselves. The way to make it count is to act on your new knowledge. Fill in the gaps to make yourself better for your current or next relationship.

Getting some sexual experience, learning to communicate, set boundaries, and gaining clarity on who and what you want in a relationship can all contribute to a better marriage.

The key here isn't necessarily having more relationships, it's learning from the ones you do have. Some people may go through more experiences to absorb the same lessons.

Prepare Yourself for a Loving Relationship

People make plans for all sorts of things but often neglect their personal lives. If you go to a personal trainer, he's going to set a diet plan, workout schedule, and rest intervals. If building a better body is worth making a plan, why don't we have action plans for our love lives?

Knowing a few stats can help make a better plan. So can experiencing multiple relationships or focusing on a few, high quality romances. Either way, learning from our experiences while growing into a better person is going to have the biggest effect.

Understand the Reality of Relationships

A lot of people run on autopilot and make no effort to learn what it takes to have a successful marriage. Recognize the differences between men and women to better understand sexual polarity, attraction, and our different needs.((Last First Date: How to Make Men Fall in Love (From a Men's Dating Coach)))

Pay attention to your relationships and build the skills you need for the long run. Be a student of life for the best results.

Be Patient for the Right Partner

Don't settle for second best. This is one area where dating multiple partners can pay off. It's often necessary to play the field to find the right partner. What a lot of people do is settle for whomever gives them some attention. This is needy behavior and won't help to make a strong marriage.

It's perfectly possible to marry the first person you date and do well, but more often than not it's pure luck. Expand your options so you can pick the right person for you.

Don't Rush to the Altar

Rushing into a marriage can have numerous consequences. For one, it takes years to really get to know someone. All sorts of things will boil to the surface after spending years with an individual. Second, waiting a few years can teach you how to navigate a relationship.

> "Dating 3 or more years before getting engaged leads to a much more stable marriage. This finding probably comes as no surprise, but it should stand as a warning to those who are eager to get married right away. Don't jump into marriage before you really get to know someone." - Randal Olsen

Here's one factor where multiple relationships aren't an advantage. We can learn important lessons by sticking with the same person.

Commit to Personal Growth

Probably the most important factor of all. No relationship is going to survive a bad character. It's important to look to yourself for the causes of any problems.

Not taking full responsibility for our outcomes means bouncing from one relationship to another, never getting what we want. After all, wherever you go, there you are, and your problems too. Carrying our baggage from one relationship to another is a sure way to poison the well.
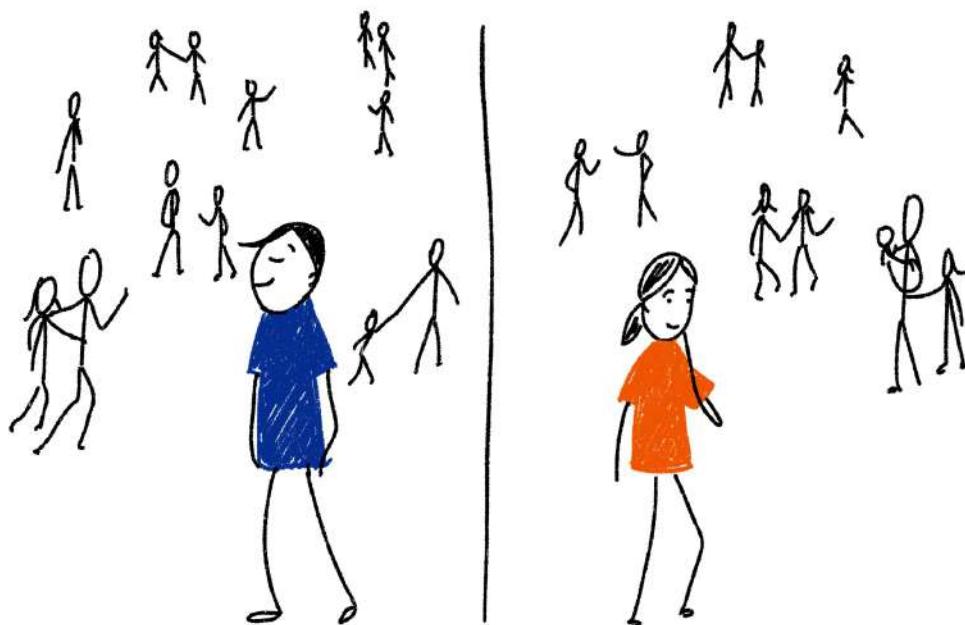
By committing to personal growth you'll learn about yourself, other people, and important life skills. Being our best selves means we'll have more to offer our ideal partner.

Staying in an Unhappy Relationship Is Not Love

Dating in today's society is difficult. It's like navigating a mine field. Once people finally find someone they can settle down with, they want that relationship to last. Even if it means settling when they feel unhappy in the relationship, have to tolerate discomfort in the relationship, and convincing themselves that the relationship will be better some day.

No one wants to be sad for sure. But why so many people choose to stay in an unhappy relationship even though they find it unfulfilling?
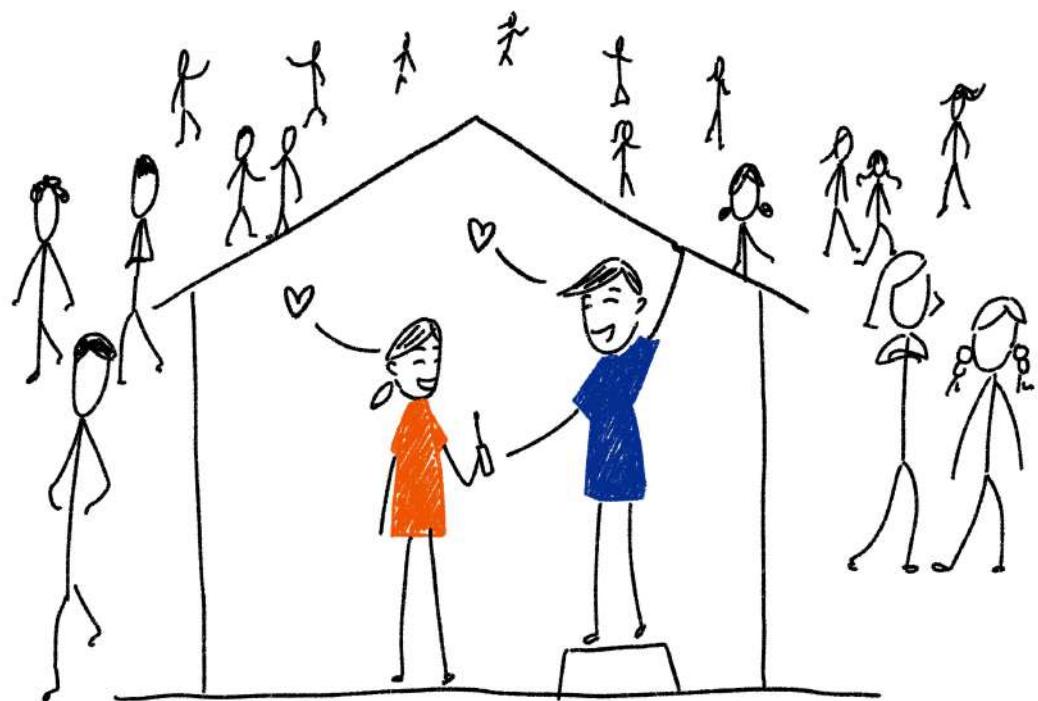
Think about life before anyone entering a relationship. They were going along, relatively happy, free and doing their own thing.

Then they met and possibly fell in love with their partner. And things changed.

It was great at first. They started to build their own box, forming a close bonding.

But then things began to shift because of different reasons. People will endure sadness, depression and live a life that is unfulfilled because it's convenient and they are afraid to leave their comfy and cozy little box.

They will rationalize staying for a variety of reasons. Maybe they have kids together or have lots of shared memories. Maybe they have been together for many years and have invested a lot in building the box. They just don't want to waste everything they've built.

They may think that they can still make the relationship better. They look at everything in the box and though they see the massive room for improvement, they want to fix those issues. They believe that love is tough and it needs to be hard in order to work. Or, they feel that they just haven't tried hard enough.

Humans are creatures of habit. Once you find something that works and that makes you feel comfortable, you fight to keep it. For most people it's just easier to stay. That's the default. The box is safe and familiar.

The Problem with the Box

The problem with the box is that it blocks people from being aware of what happens inside and outside their relationship.

While some of the reasons such as having kids together are legitimate to stay in a relationship, people need to do a deeper assessment to determine the true reasons for wanting to stay.

If people only think about the effort spent on building this box, all the memories, emotions and things shared throughout the time and hate to let all of that go; they are sacrificing their opportunities to be happier. This is actually a sunk cost bias. It means when people have spent a lot of effort on something, they won't stop investing in it even if it's going wrong. They don't want to waste the previous investment but this has blocked them from exploring and investing in better opportunities.

Many have also misunderstood the term "hard work". No one should work like a slave to make a relationship work. Engaging in the constant struggle only brings the worst out of both people. These struggles won't make a relationship healthy and loving.

People might ask "but how'd you know if you never tried? Maybe when I try harder, things will be different." No one would ever know the future. As humans, we're hard-wired to want to know the unknowns. Anything that has not yet been completed will leave us wonder how it will become. It's our nature to wonder, but everyone has the power not to be led by their curiosity when deciding what's best for themselves. Besides, you would never know you wouldn't be happier if you never got out of the unhappy relationship.

How to Get Out of the Box

The first and most important thing to do when contemplating ending the relationship is talk with your partner. Regardless how they feel and what you ultimately choose to do, your partner deserves to know upfront that you are happy and are contemplating ending the relationship. Having this type of crucial conversation is not fun or easy. But it is the right thing to do for both yourself and your partner. Honesty is always the best option in the end.

Press Pause

Sometimes, easing out of a relationship is easier than just ripping the band-aid off. So after initiating that difficult conversation, both of you may need to take a break from each other. It could be the best way to give you both space to breathe and really evaluate the relationship.

Taking a break is not a license to cheat. Nor is it an opportunity for you to see if there is someone out there better than what you have. The break is about self-reflection and self-evaluation. It's a trip you have to take alone. If, per chance, you do find someone else during your time apart, break things off with your partner immediately. You always want to act with integrity.

Set a time limit for how long the break will last. Once the predetermined amount of time has passed, be sure to come together and discuss next steps. You never want to leave the relationship or your partner in limbo. You, the relationship and your partner need closure.

Talk the Difficult Talk

When the break is over, gather again to talk about your thoughts about the relationship. If you have decided to end the relationship, don't establish false expectations in any way. Be clear about your intentions and your desire to end the relationship amicably. Don't make your partner think that if he or she changes something that the relationship will continue.

Don't blame them for the relationship ending. Just let them know that you are unhappy in this relationship but not because of anything he or she has done. It isn't a good fit. Be lovingly firm in your explanation.

Stay Because of Love, Not Fear

Deciding to end a relationship is never really easy— especially if you care for the other person.

If you want a genuinely happy, healthy and fulfilling relationship, you have to be willing to take some risks. Staying in a relationship out of fear, guilt or for any other reason except genuine and true affection for the other person is damaging to you, your partner and the relationship.

If you truly love your partner, have the courage to stay. If not, have the courage to leave.

Negotiation Doesn't Need to Be Hurting

Compromise is hard. Whether you have a hard time with it because you are an only child, or because you just hate to make sacrifices, compromise is hard. When it comes to relationship, it is inevitable, but that doesn't make it any less daunting.

When you have unhealthy compromise, one person feels like they are the only one having to sacrifice something, and this one-sided relationship can cause so much resentment and anger that the relationship can't survive. Therefore, it's vital to know how to navigate compromise as a team so that everyone feels like it's handled fairly.

Couples compromise when it comes to job changes, moving, even deciding what color to paint the kitchen. Some compromises are small and some seem ominously huge, but they are all equally important in ensuring each side feels valued. ((My Body+Soul: The 5 rules of fair compromise in a relationship))

It would be nice to think we are all selfless. But it's not the truth.

At its core, compromise is hard because it means one person in the relationship is probably not going to get what they want. This means they are giving up their desires for the other person. While it would be nice to think we are all so selfless, the truth is it's hard to give things up when we want them. Sometimes, we get so caught up in getting what we want, that we don't realize how unwilling we are to compromise. This typically leads our partner to do the majority of sacrificing which can cause some big resentment issues ((Kiki Ramsey: It's All About Compromise)).

Sometimes compromise isn't easy to spot. Take for example a married couple who is deciding what to do for a date night. The wife wants to stay in because she is stressed from work and just wants to read quietly in bed. The husband wants to go see a movie in an attempt to have a date night. Wife is frustrated at this last minute recommendation but she chooses to say yes to avoid hurting his feelings. However, unbeknownst to the Wife, the Husband didn't want to see a movie either. Instead, he just wanted to find some way to spend time with his wife, as he is feeling disconnected.

They *both* compromised, but neither of them know it because they didn't voice their inner thoughts ((Bettertherapy.com: Are You Compromising Too Much in Your Relationship?)). Though this may seem like a silly problem, the truth is that both of them now feel misunderstood by the other and maybe even disrespected.

The Wife was distracted throughout the whole movie, thinking about what she needed to do at work the next day, and the Husband was sad she wasn't more romantic with him. After all, he wanted a date with his wife. Wouldn't most wives be grateful for that attention? Maybe, but that's only if the communication was strong enough that both of them understood what the other truly wanted and why.

When you can negotiate and reach a compromise, your relationship grows

Healthy compromise helps you and your partner be your best selves. You both choose, at some point, a temporary discomfort in order to achieve a shared goal. This leads to a stronger relationship, as you are both doing what's best for the other. If you feel taken advantage of, or like you are the only one compromising, that's a problem. It should be about you two and your future. Not just your partner.

How to Compromise

Keep it equal.

Yes, compromise means one of you isn't getting their way, but it shouldn't make you hurt or angry. Before you request a compromise or ask your partner to give something up, consider what you are offering in return. This shouldn't be a bribe, but rather a way to ensure you are both making changes.

Don't try to compromise if you're mad.

Think about the last big argument you had with your partner or spouse. Did anything positive or productive come from it? Probably not. Compromise is no different. Only discuss it when you're feeling open-minded and calm. You want a discussion, not a fight. Compromise produced during resentment will only wreck the relationship.

Don't compromise the important things.

Remember, compromise should benefit you both in the long run. If the compromise on the table involves one of you giving up a dream, family, friendship, or career, take a step back. Assuming none of these things are somehow toxic to the relationship, you should never feel like you have to lose a part of who you are to help you partner. Growing and changing in a relationship is great. Becoming a different, unrecognizable person with no dreams or happiness? Not OK.

Keep it fair.

To keep a relationship functioning, remember that compromise can't mean one of you has to roll over. Take this example ((About Relationships: How to Compromise in Marriage or Your Relationship)) , "If you move to the city, you might have an easier commute and be happier in the fast-paced lifestyle. But will your spouse's commute double? Will he or she be put out by the frenetic life? Is that fair to him or her?" If it doesn't seem fair, you need to reach a true compromise that does. Otherwise, you are just being disrespectful.

Don't waffle!

Waffling means you're going back and forth on something. This is everyone's biggest pet peeve. If you've made a decision and you and your spouse have agreed on it, don't change your mind. If you come back to the conversation with a whole new opinion, not only does it make you seem wishy-washy in the relationship, but it becomes challenging for your spouse to view you as a stable partner. If you have made a decision, stick with it.

In summary, remember that compromise is a part of love. It can be challenging, frustrating and sometimes feel impossible, but remember that everyone does it. If you feel like you're having a hard time compromising, it doesn't mean you and your partner should break up or seek counselling right away, but it does mean the two of you need to sit down and figure out what is keeping you from being successful.

It could help to make a list of what you are having a hard time compromising about and see if there's a common thread. If all of the elements make you feel like you're giving up your identify, then that's a problem. But if it's a matter of refusing to change, then you need to do some introspection and figure out how to overcome that.

You should always feel like the compromise is equal; you and your partner should always have to give and take, not just one of you. The idea of compromising is that it brings you both happiness and security in the long run, not just instant gratification. This often means one of you may be temporarily disappointed, but that's OK. And if you feel like you can't get it right and the compromise is not coming easily after trying, don't be afraid to seek counselling. Compromise is important, and it's worth getting help if it means saving the relationship.

Section III: Mental Strength and Time
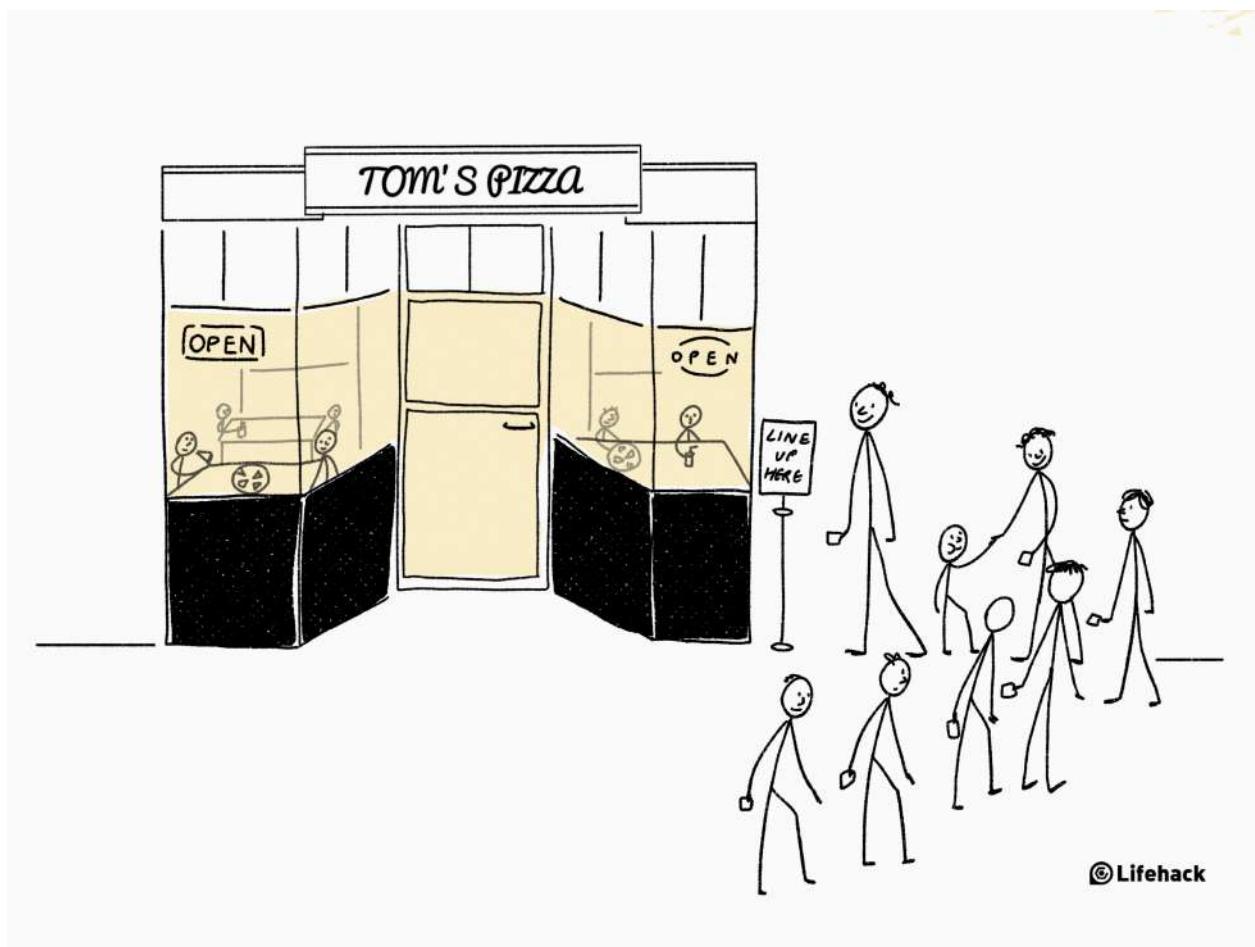
Athletes have to participate in proper training programs by the time they are 14 years old. This is not only to train up their physical strength, but also their mental toughness. Such training program builds an individual's strength and agility, and is important to mental development. Here in this section, you will find all the advice you need to train up your mental strength in a timely manner.

# The Only Time That Change Doesn't Make You Better

Tom's always liked cooking, and his friends have always backed him up on how good he is -- especially some of his homemade pizzas. So he pulled together a few pieces and decided to open a pizza place.
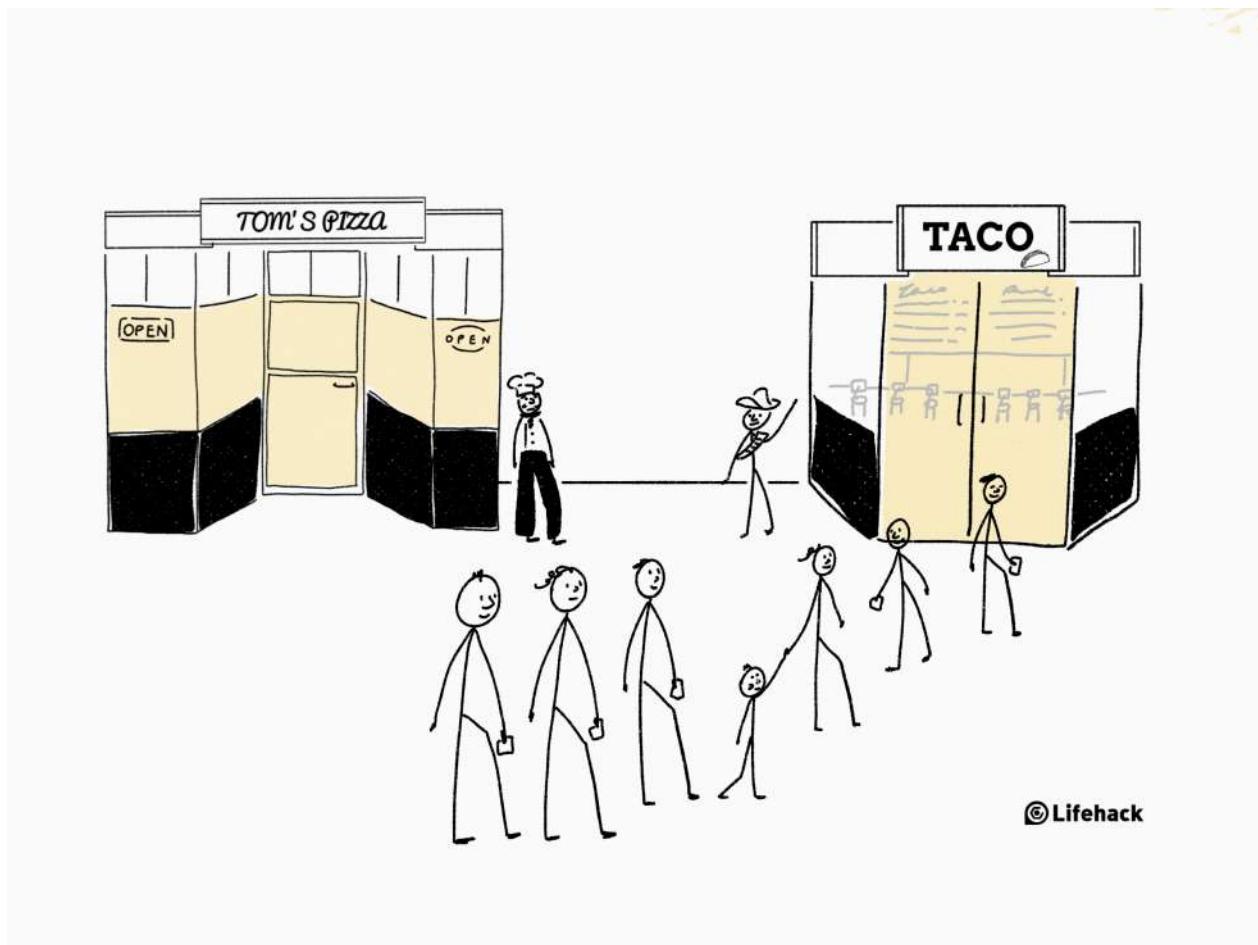

The first year of business was good. Lots of customers went to his restaurant to try his pizzas.
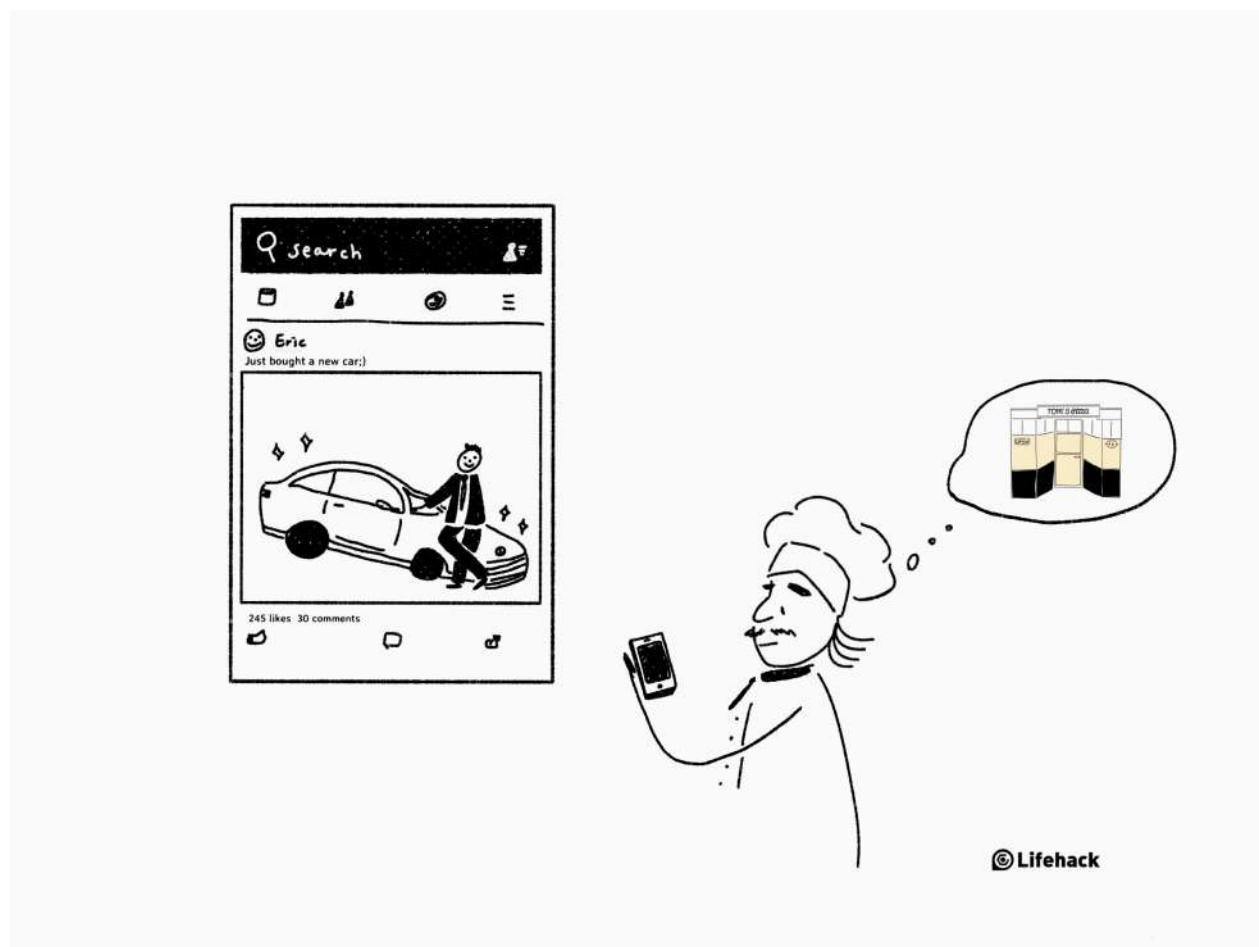
But after a year, a taco place opened up nearby and was becoming popular. Their lines seemed longer and their business seemed more robust.

As this was all happening, Tom was scrolling through Facebook one day. He saw that one of his old friends, who currently works in banking services, just bought himself a new car.

Doubt was creeping in.

"Why do I have to be so persistent in this business?"

"Why can't this be easier?"
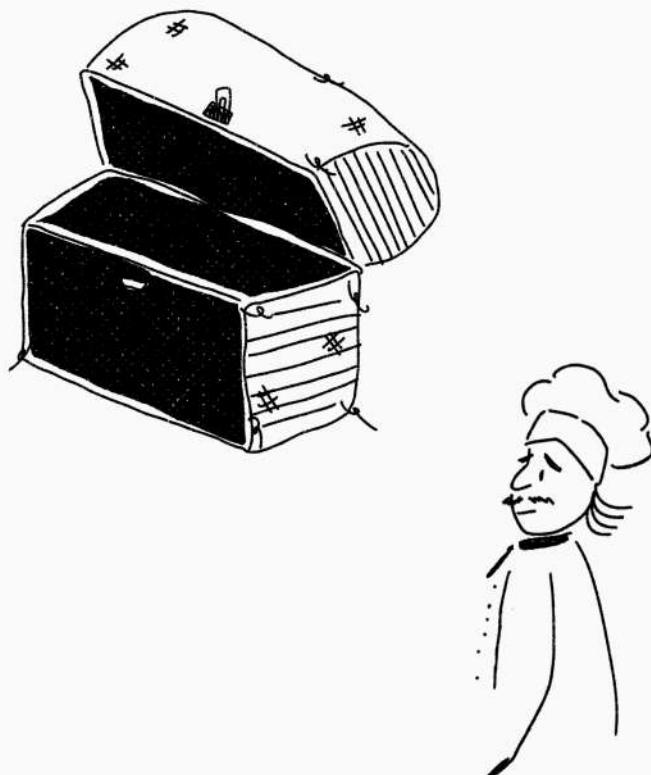
We all do this to some extent: we struggle, we compare to others, and **we think about whether we should give up.**

Chasing the Perfect Treasure Chest

The perfect treasure chest is a concept many human beings chase. What it means is this: when we *don't* have something, we imagine this concept of a perfect treasure chest others may have. The chest is beautiful, ornate, and has all the "right" things inside of it.

We think about our own treasure chest and it seems ugly, faded, and containing metals and stuff with no value.

We are comparing but doing it wrong.
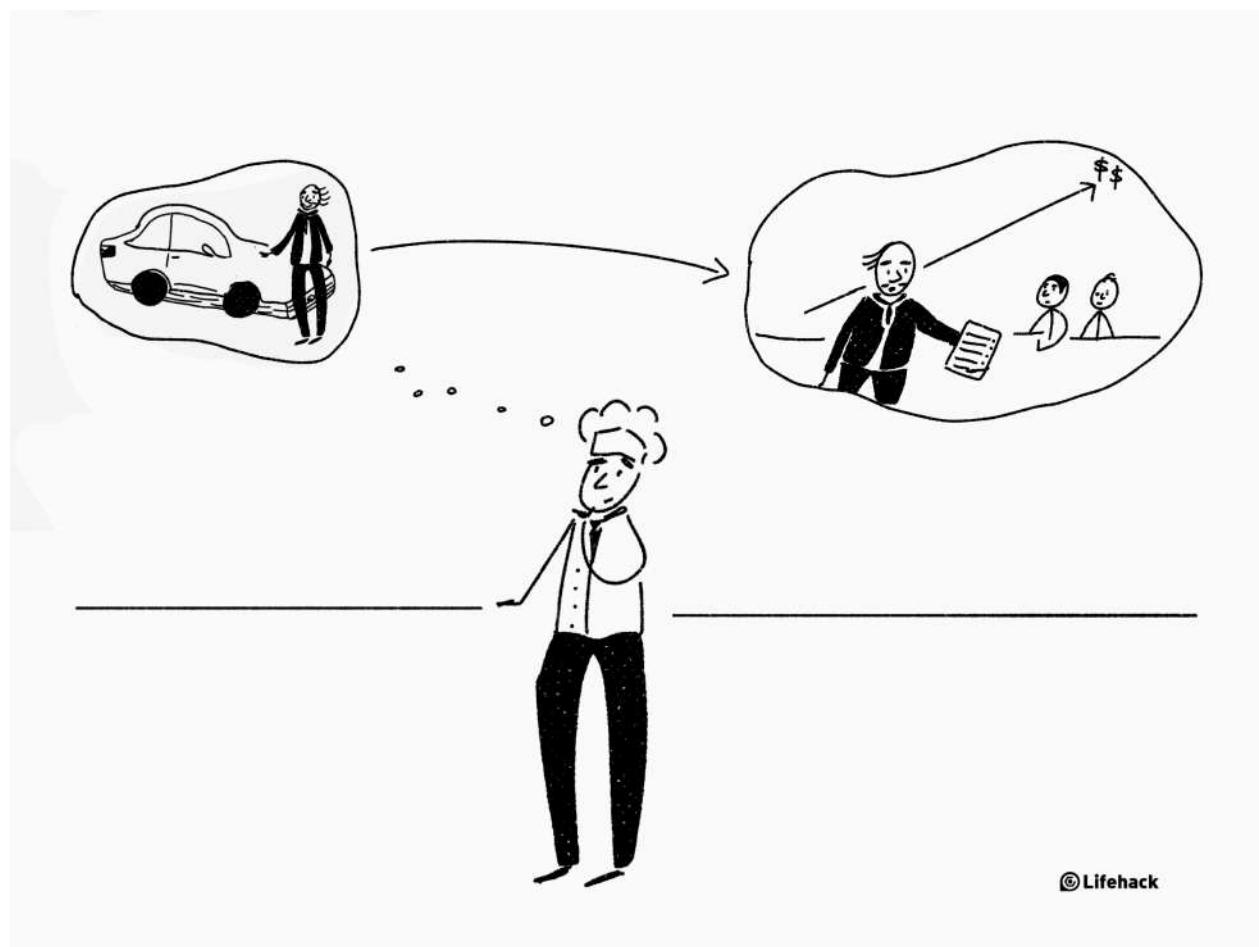
The problem is this: a lot of things we want or see others having (rewards, nice cars, big houses, etc.) can be attained by us too at some point. But once they're attained, the fantasy associated with them is gone. Once the fantasy is gone, it's easier to see downsides. This is why many people don't feel satisfied even when they accrue lots of possessions.

Now let's turn back to Tom. Tom could get that luxury car.
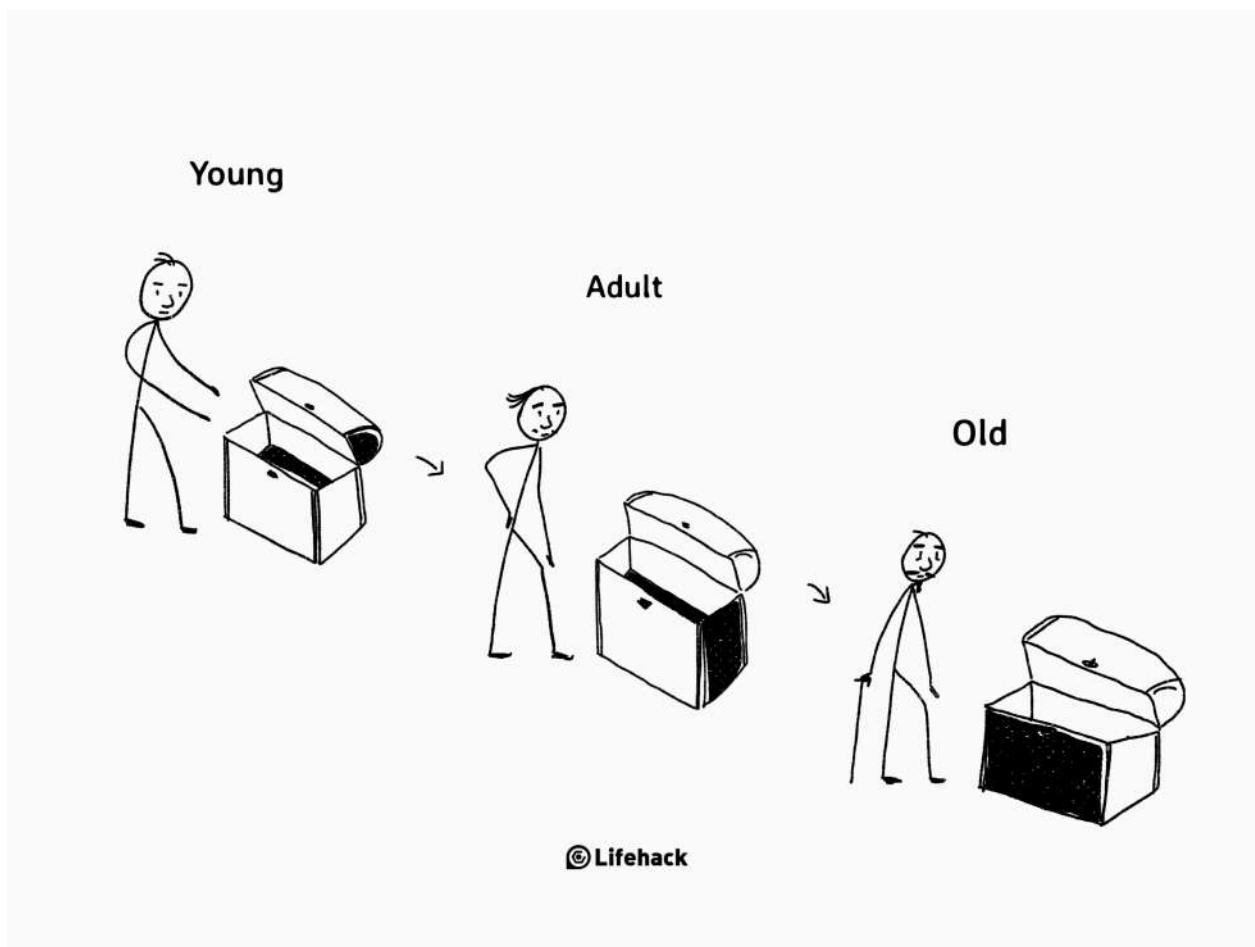
But he would need to deal with a lot of uncomfortable clients to promote his financial plans to satisfy their clients needs, and do a lot of networking to connect with different business men. It would be a lot of tough work too behind that luxurious car.

Eventually he'll see the downsides of this car. Once that happens, what will he want? The *next* perfect treasure chest.

The cycle just keeps going. ON and on. You'll never find that perfect treasure chest.

What *can* you do, though?

Embrace the Flawed Chest

Reward is important, but you need to understand the downsides of opportunities too. In reality, every chest contains something you don't want. Maybe half of them are gold and jewels, and the other half of them are crappy metals.

Look inside any theoretical treasure chest. Some may have more "gold," others more "diamonds," and most might have some degree of rusted, crappy metals. The gold is great and seems valuable (huge house, flashy car). But do you really *need* the "gold" in this perfect treasure chest? Potentially not.

The truly important aspect is looking at the crappy old metals and thinking, "How could these become gold in my eyes?" In other words, what is needed to turn them into new opportunities? How can the downsides become the next upsides?

There are two approaches: you can either ditch the old treasure chest in pursuit of the new perfect chest, but that will become a lifelong circular struggle with no potential resolution.

Or you can **figure out what elements of the old chest can be turned into new opportunities**, and you might get closer to personal fulfillment.

The Perfect Chest Never Exists, Stop the Endless Chase
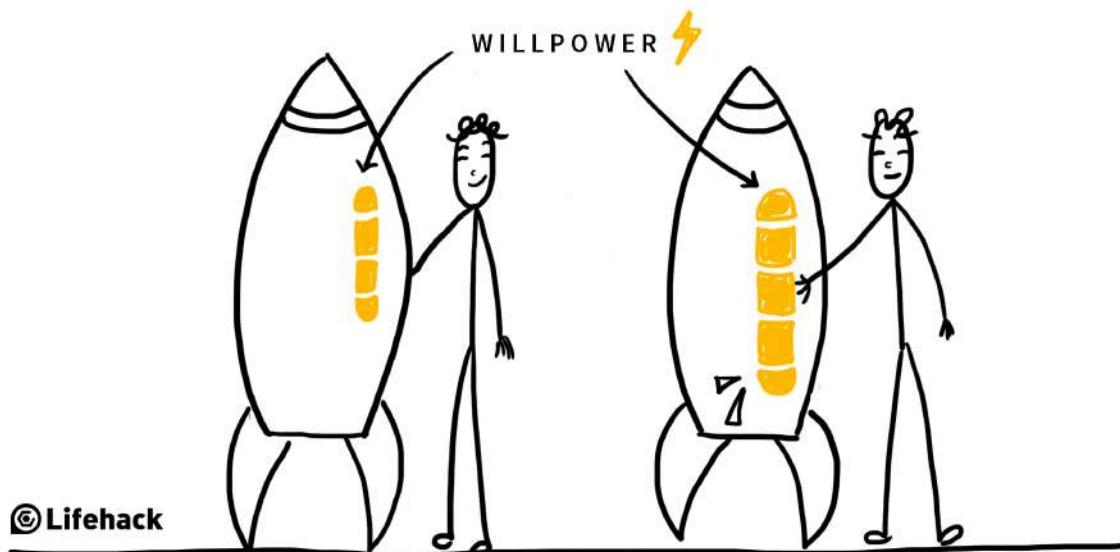
Consistently chasing the next beautiful, grandiose thing will not bring you closer to fulfillment. Think more on what you *really* want, not the flashy elements of the next perfect treasure chest.

You have the ability to make the right choice here. Don't quit easily. If you choose to pursue a treasure chest, remember that you can learn a lot more from the old, ugly metals than the flashy gold you smile at. The ugly metals are the opportunities you need to grow.

Willpower Has Been Overrated
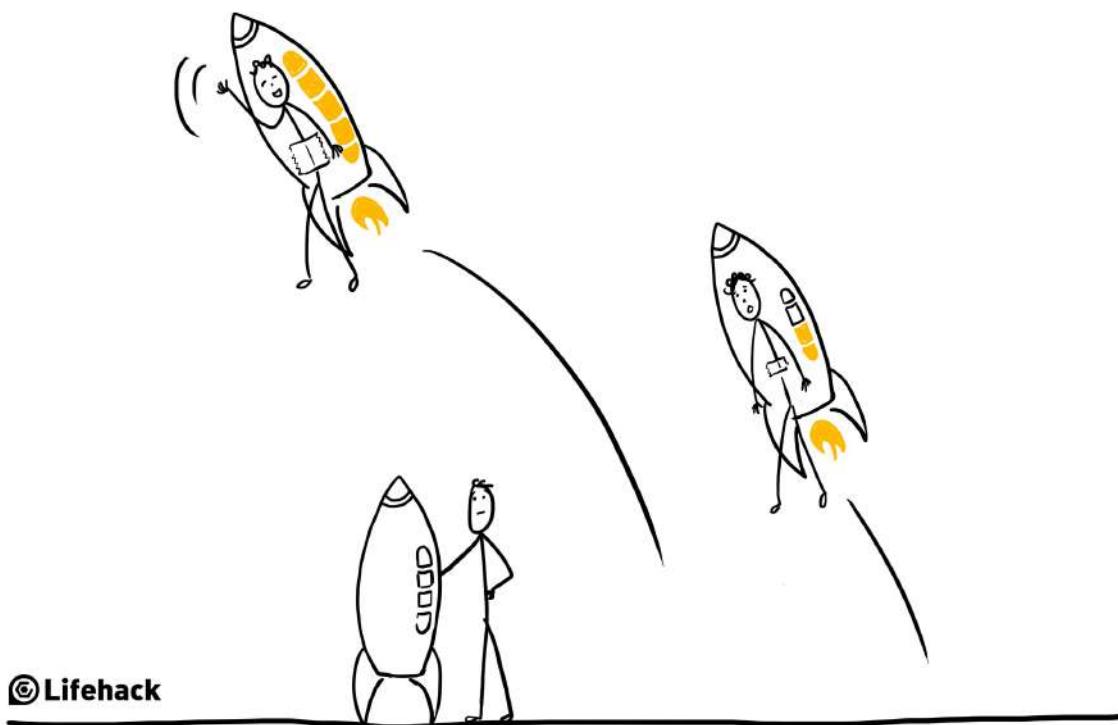
Willpower can be described as the ability to control or reject desires to indulge in harmful and useless habits. It also allows people to arrive at decisions and then follow them through with perseverance until success has been achieved. Additionally, willpower can help us delay gratification, which as humans, we're hard-wired to want instantly.

To give you a concrete example of willpower, just think of school. Students need willpower to self-control themselves to maintain attention in class, and to avoid breaking school rules in order to be seen as a good student.

In our modern age, willpower has become known as an important element in success. By has it always been this way?

How We Came to Believe That Willpower Leads to Success

In ancient times we didn't need willpower, instead, we followed our natural instincts to survive.

However, as civilization evolved, humans wanted to put things in order. We started to create rules for people to follow. And only by following these rules could someone get what they want, and survive in a modern society. Because of these rules, we started to make self-discipline a virtue.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a marshmallow experiment proved willpower was the key to success.((The Atlantic: What the Marshmallow Test Really Teaches About Self-Control)) The Stanford marshmallow experiment was a series of studies on delayed gratification led by psychologist Walter Mischel, then a professor at Stanford University. The study was simple but revealing. It tested children on a choice between the following rewards:

1. Immediately being able to eat a marshmallow.
2. Waiting 20 minutes and then being able to eat two marshmallows.

The results of the study were fascinating. Children who were able to wait for the double reward, typically fared better in later life than those children who took the instant gratification route.
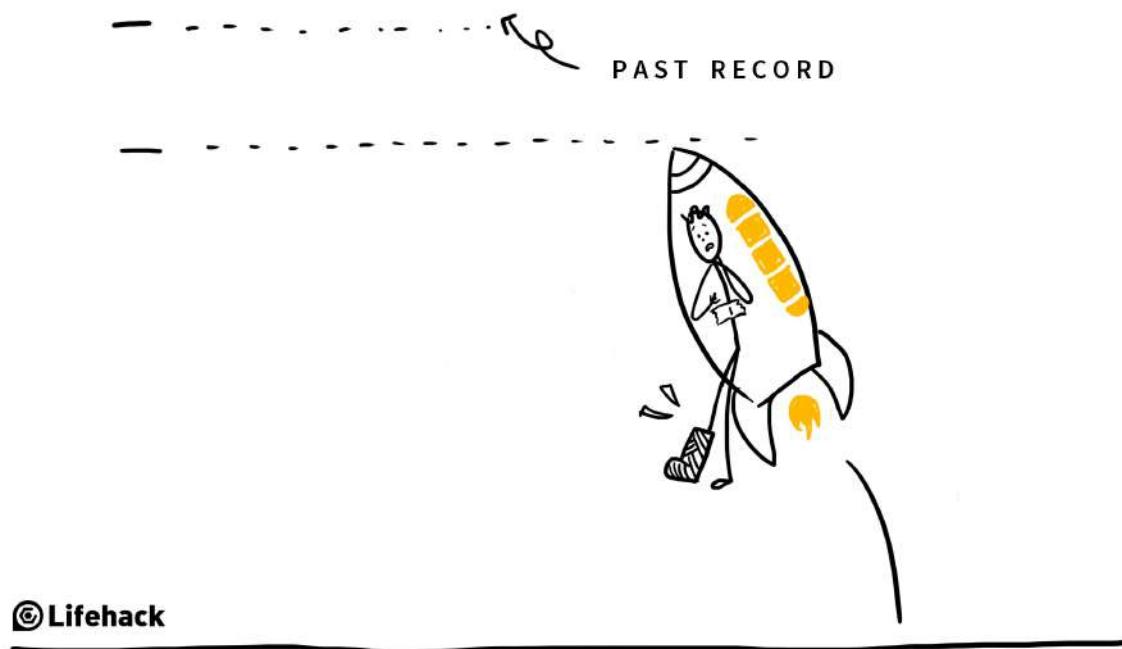
Because of this famous study, more emphasis began to be put on the benefits of strengthening willpower.

Nowadays, it's fair to say that willpower controls a lot of what we do - as we see it as something critical to reaching goals and achieving things. And it's not just about *I want* power, but also about *I will*, and *I won't*.((Positive Psychology Program: The Psychology of Willpower: Training the Brain for Better Decisions))

Willpower training has also become big business. There's countless workshops, online seminars as well as best-selling books such as *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength* and *The Willpower Instinct*.

Try searching for "willpower boost" on Google, and you'll find thousands of results for articles that purport to show you the ways to do it.

The Limited Power of Willpower

However, most people's willpower remains weak. Some of the reasons for this are:

- Emotions - which can affect our motivation levels.
- Our physical condition - are you getting enough sleep? (For example.)

- Previous failures - repeating these in our minds kills our willpower.((Go To Things: Importance Of Willpower In Life))

On top of the above issues, you may have noticed that even when you have an abundance of willpower, it has its limits. Every day, in one form or another, you exert willpower. For instance, if you resist eating a tasty piece of chocolate cake offered to you, then you've had to use emotional and mental power.
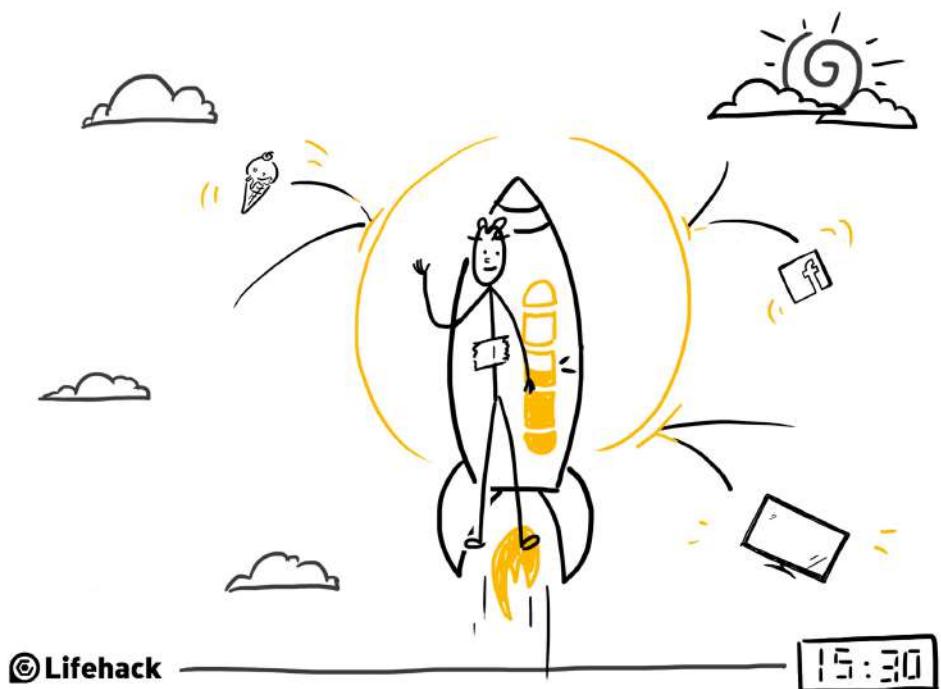
Willpower is similar to a muscle. If we overuse it, we get tired. In other words, willpower is a limited resource.((American Psychology Association: What You Need to Know about Willpower))
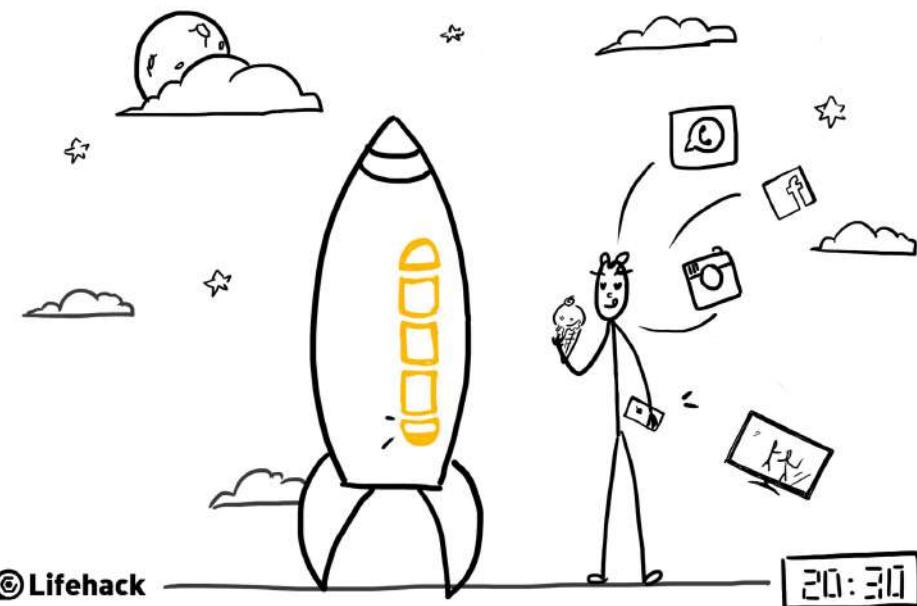
How to Succeed with Limited Willpower

Once you realize that willpower has its limits, then the key thing to know is that you must follow a system to reach your goals and dreams. **Put systems first, and willpower second.**

Willpower is close to useless, if you do not allow it to work alongside a personal success system.

What is this system that I refer to? It's a system that creates the right conditions in your mind and environment that helps make your success a surefire outcome. With this type of system in place, willpower will simply be an extra bonus in helping you to reach success. But to be clear, with the right system, even if your willpower fails, you'll still keep on the road to success and achievement. These are the essential steps to build your own success system:

1. Create an environment that is conducive to success

Think for a moment about willpower. On its own, it doesn't place any emphasis on *changing* your environment, instead, it puts its focus on *overcoming* your environment. It's no wonder then, when the limited willpower begins to fail, people succumb to environmental influences - despite their best efforts to resist.

As human beings, we are consciously and unconsciously influenced by what's around us. These could be the news we read, the stories our friends tell us, and even the influence our home has on us.

The secret is to, where possible, create an environment that helps (not hinders) the reaching of your goals. For example, if you want to spot binge eating snacks, give away all your snacks to others, and make sure you can't reach any kind of snacks at your workplace or home.

Your environment can also be used to directly support your goals. For instance, if you want to be a professional artist, surround yourself with professional artists.

2. Know what makes you happy

By knowing what makes you happy, you'll also reveal what motivates you. This is important.

Take a look around at others, or delve into your past, and you will find that willpower falters when people encounter failure or come across negative events. This clearly demonstrates that willpower is affected by external factors, thus making it unreliable.

Knowing what makes you happy is the perfect way to stay motivated to reach your goals - even when your willpower crumbles. This can be through rewarding yourself by watching a great movie (once you've achieved a goal milestone), or by simply enjoying the inner bliss you receive when walking on the pathway that keeps you happy, motivated and successful.

Replace Your Old Beliefs - and Find New Success

Willpower is not the *be all and end all* we've been taught to believe. While it's certainly a component of success, it's nowhere near as important as all the self-help gurus claim.

As I've discussed above, having a system and a goal, are much more powerful factors in success than willpower.

So, now you know the truth about success, take the steps I've suggested, and begin achieving more than you ever thought possible. And if you need any further motivation to help you on your way, check out the Lifehack article Make Good Habits Stick Easily With Productive—the Habit Tracker.

The Taste of Everything's True Value

Sir Thomas Allen, the performer who inspired the *Billy Elliot* story, is an opera singer who is famous for his outstanding vocal and acting prowess on the operatic stage. He was born in a working-class mining town in north-east England, where most people grew up to become a miner or involve in heavy industry at that time. Growing up in a community where a career in the arts was not looked upon, he had to deal with peer pressure and criticisms from neighbors. He could have just given up and led the same career like others did, but he worked even harder to become a great opera singer.((British Favourite Baritone: Sir Thomas Allen))

All successful people have to overcome numerous disappointments and failures in life - yet it's usually only their successes that are celebrated and remembered by the public. Seeing only the positive sides of successful people is an illusion. It causes expectations of success in an unrealistically short time, and creates a negative bias towards our own results in life.

The Want for Instant Results Is Inborn

The desire for instant results began when we were just babies. By simply crying loud enough, babies could get attention, food - or someone to play with. As babies got older, the expectation of having their needs instantly fulfilled never really went away. In truth, even adults seek instant rewards, but the methods have just changed from crying to be fed to heading to the nearest fast food outlet.

It's the same with information. Years ago, to properly research a subject, you would have spent hours or days perusing the reference section at your local library. Nowadays, due to the power of the internet, you expect online search results to instantly display on your device.

Sure, fast food outlets and the internet have some positive benefits. But if you're not careful, they can also lead you into a mental trap — always wanting to see results appear as rapidly as possible.

Sadly, not everything can be as instant as eating fast food. Some things in life take time.

For example, instead of persevering with a challenging job, you might decide to quit it, and take something easier to handle. You may tell yourself that the new job will offer some decent opportunities for growth, but in reality, you've most likely just taken the easy way out.

As you'll see next, expecting instant results is likely to cause you to skid off the road that leads to big success.

Things Never Get Easier When You Switch to Others

Now, don't get me wrong. I realize that it's tough to spend all your time and effort on something, and not to see any immediate results. It can be disheartening. And when this occurs, it's easy to just switch to doing other things (especially with so many options being available in today's world).

But in fact, the idea that things will get easier and better because of switching to other things is a fantasy. Sure, the instant pleasure of giving up for another option might feel good at first, but unless it's moving you forward to a bigger goal, then it may actually be hindering you. By taking a short-term benefit, most people end up sacrificing their long-term goals and happiness.

Bottlenecks and problems are everywhere. Even if you switch from one goal to another, you'll still be constantly faced with challenges and difficulties. They never go away. So it's better to stick to your guns - rather than throwing them away every time you hit a bad patch.

Right after I founded Lifehack, things were not so smooth. I did my very best to ensure a stable web server and a reader-friendly website layout. I also spent a lot of effort on high quality productivity articles. But I didn't see a lot of rewarding results. There were only a few readers and some even left comments criticising my work. I was frustrated, and there were people telling my to quit, offering me job opportunities as a senior engineer or a manager. There were so many options available to me, and giving up seemed so easy. But if I gave up right there based on the results at that time, Lifehack wouldn't be what it is today.

How to Resist Giving Up
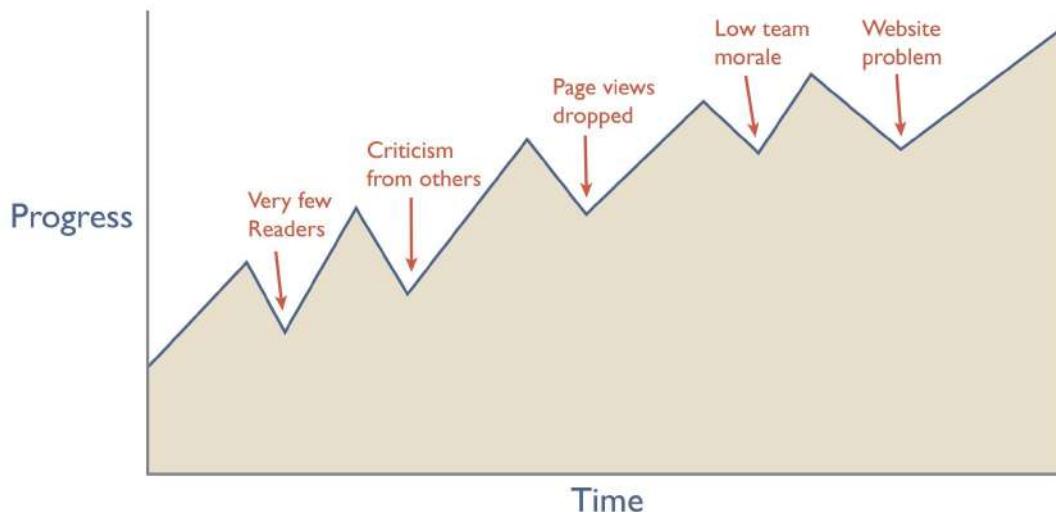
It's not easy to resist the desire for instant results making us want to give up, but here's what I've been doing to stay motivated - and it always works.

1. Widen your perspective and draw out the big picture in your head

Realize that we only see a big fluctuation at the moment issues arise - but we're probably missing the big picture. Journeys to major successes are likely to be long and time-consuming. If we reach a disappointment during the journey, it's most likely to only be a

small dip on an upward-trending pathway.

My Journey to Success

Accept that you'll constantly be presented with examples of people around you getting awards, receiving applause, looking successful, etc. This is really tough, but try to celebrate their success, rather than letting it remind you of your failures.

You'll know that you're making headway once you've learned to experience every day as just part of a longer journey.

2. Put the incremental progress before your eyes

You may not have been taught this at school, but lasting progress is typically only made through incremental steps. American author Robert Collier described this principle well: "Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out."

To keep yourself on track for long-term success, adopt this formula: **Small, Smart Choices + Consistency + Time = Radical Difference** ((The Mission: 10X Your Results, One Tiny Action at a Time (The Power of Incremental Progress))

- **Small, Smart Choices.** Take big tasks and break them into smaller components. This is a great technique to use when you feel that you're not making any progress. Take painting a room, for example. Just the thought of doing it might be enough to prevent you from starting. However, if you make an effort to paint one of the walls, you'll likely find the motivation and desire to finish painting the whole room.
- **Consistency.** Make everyday's small choices count. For example, are you using your mornings to be productive? Many successful people work on their health and fitness before breakfast. Whether they choose to run around a local park, or exercise at a gym,

they have made a habit of putting their physical strength and stamina to the top of their daily to-do list.

- **Time.** Progress takes time. The small and smart choices you make every day will be accumulated into something great in a month, and a year. For example, if you run for 4km every day, it'll become 120km every month, and 1460km every year — that's a lot of running in a year.

If you only focus on the outcome you want, you may have difficulty visualizing the progress you've made so far. To overcome this, **always keep a record of what you've done and celebrate small wins**.

Take running as an example again. Say you can only run for 2km in your first week. By the end of it, you can barely catch your breath, and 4k seems like 40km. But Time and Consistency accumulates results. After a week, your steps become lighter and your breath comes easier and there you go, you can run for 3km after the second week. That extra 1km is a small win that you should celebrate.

By doing this, you give yourself feedback and recognition that can help you to stay driven and on track. As already mentioned, difficulties will appear on your journey towards success. However, by recognizing your small wins, this will keep you from falling into the 'no results now' trap.

It's a Continuous Battle
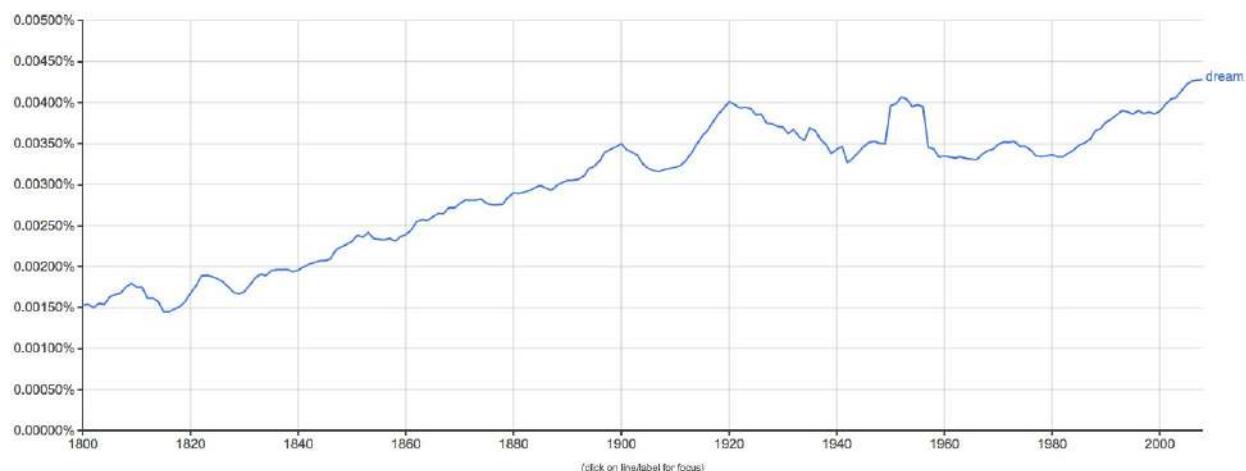
It may look like it's easier to switch to something else at that moment, but in fact it only makes the future path even more difficult.

All successful people have gone through a lot of tough times to become what they are today. If you want to become successful, put my advice into action and you will be resistant to giving up.

Pursuing Dreams is Like an Iceberg

When 9-year-old aspiring singer Celine Tam was asked by a judge from America's Got Talent what her big dream was when she grew up, she instantly replied: "This is my dream." ((YouTube: Celine Tam: 9-Year-Old Stuns Crowd with "My Heart Will Go On" - America's Got Talent 2017))

Of course, it's not just Celine who likes to talk about dreams. Google shows that there's an uprising trend that people love to talk about dreams:((GoogleBooks: Ngram Viewer - Dreams))

When people discuss their dreams, they nearly always focus on the bright side of reaching their goals. It's as if they consciously overlook the effort needed to achieve great things. Instead, they choose to put all their faith and hope into the expected, positive results.

How Dreams Have Been Over Fantasised

It's easy to only see the positive sides of dreams — fame, fortune, attention, followers and recognition. While it's fine to enjoy fantasy thoughts of how life could be in the future, these thoughts will always remain nothing but a fantasy until you start taking action.

You might dream of being in a pop band, having a hit single and album, and touring the world to adoring fans. You've seen other artists do it, and you're sure that you're as talented as them - or more so. While this may be true, there's also a lot of time, effort and persistence the vast majority of successful musicians and singers have put in. And not a lot of people see these things.

These artists have dedicated a huge portion of their lives to practicing, performing and learning how to market themselves. They've also had to overcome some big obstacles to success, such as family pressure, lack of financial support, songs getting rejected hundreds of times, and no audience at the beginning.

It's easy to just focus on the bright side of successful people, rather than understanding the incredibly tough journey they survived to get there; unless you read an autobiography of them (which often details their trials and tribulations).

The Little-known Dark Times of Successful People

Consider the story of world-famous singer-songwriter Ed Sheeran.

Before releasing his debut album in 2011, Sheeran was homeless for almost three years. This included two nights sleeping rough outside Buckingham Palace in London.((Her: Ed Sheeran Reveals He Was Homeless for Two and a Half Years)) However, instead of letting his situation crash his dreams, he kept on playing gigs and recording songs. Success was a while coming... but now he's one of the world's most successful musicians, including being the first artist to have two songs debut in the U.S. top 10 in the same week.((Wikipedia: Ed Sheeran))

And then there is Elon Musk.

Before scaling the heights of success with SolarCity, SpaceX and Tesla, he first had to go through some extraordinary challenges. These included: product failures, going broke, and relentless personal criticism and accusations.((Product Hunt: ElonMusk When He Proved EveryOne Wrong)) Musk admits it was difficult, but his immense self-motivation helped him to overcome the challenges, and begin to see the fruits of his efforts.

To realistically have a chance of reaching goals, one must be willing to suffer the hardships along the way, rather than just wanting to enjoy the final destination.

If you've set your sights on success, be prepared for disappointments, frustrations and roadblocks. These things are impossible to avoid. And the bigger your dream - the more of the negatives you can expect to encounter.

So what dream to aim for? I'm going to answer you in the final section - the action part.

Stick to one dream, not dreams

Before giving you some definite pointers on choosing your ideal goal, I want you to realize this truth... *Our time on this planet is limited.* And while it's impossible to escape time, you can learn to work in harmony with it. You can do this by choosing a dream that perfectly fits your age, personality and talents.

Note that I say dream, not dreams. The reason for this, is that you'll increase your chances of success if you choose and stick to one ideal goal - rather than flitting aimlessly between unsuitable goals.

Now, to decide on your one dream, be sure that you are willing to suffer for it with these five criteria:

1. 90% of the work for this dream will be hard. I am willing to suffer and sacrifice for it.
2. I will commit 100% of my time and energy to my dream.
3. I will give up things such as luxury goods and leisure time in order to reach my dream.
4. My dream will always excite me so much that I will happily overcome any hardships and obstacles.
5. I have what it takes to reach my dream.

Please stop for a moment, and read each statement again. Then give yourself time to really process them. You may be surprised as you process these statements... "But spare time is quite important to me", or "my life seems to be okay right now", or "I don't think I can spend that much effort on it."

These thoughts are perfectly fine, but they indicate that your one dream should be realistic and achievable.

However, if you have these thoughts... "I'm ready to take on the world," "I'm willing to sacrifice my time, money and energy," "I'm absolutely committed to achieving success," then you're ready to aim for the stars! Choose a BIG dream - and make it a reality!

I don't want to tell you specifically what dreams to choose, as this could limit your decision. Instead, I recommend you **spend a few days analyzing what you do best, what you enjoy the most, and what benefits you can offer to others**. Once you have two or three ideas, narrow these down by determining how much effort and resources they require to achieve. Finally, choose your goal - and commit to sticking to it.

Choose your dream wisely, stick to it and get to work on achieving it. You will not regret doing it.

The Missing Gap Between Passion And Success

Do what you love and love what you do, and success will come? Well, we wish.

Reality is not as simple as we want it to be. It takes more than just passion to succeed in anything.

> "I always like to look on the optimistic side of life, but I am realistic enough to know that life is a complex matter." -- Walt Disney

Disney's words echo with what I've recently read – an article written by Stephen Guise that talks about why you don't need passion to succeed. Instead of needing passion to succeed, he says that you need to care about succeeding in what you want to do.((Stephen Guise: [The Experts Are Wrong – You Don't Need Passion To Succeed](#)))

Passion is just emotion; care is an action.

Wishing hard and wanting something really badly won't give you anything.

Passion (NOUN) – *"strong or barely controllable emotion."*

Care (VERB) – *"Feel concern or interest; attach importance to something."*

Passion is a "barely controllable emotion", and emotions' not always reliable. Care is different, it implies actions.

In today's world where people always talk about finding your passion, it still seems vague to many. On the other hand, if you're asked to find something you care about, it's easier for you to name it.

You can choose to care anything at any time. When you care about something, you see that thing as really important to you and you'll do what you can to protect it.

I know some of you may then say, "But Steve Jobs said people with passion can change the world and he really did change the world with his Apple products!"

Steve Jobs is undeniably a passionate entrepreneur, and he's passionate about making an impact on this world. But he also had his down times when that passionate emotion would fade. What's left in Steve Jobs when the passion's not there suddenly? There's definitely a lot more than passion in him.

Like it ≠ Good at it

There's a lot of work to do besides being passionate. For example, you can be passionate about painting, but if you don't have any art sense and painting skills, you can hardly become an expert in painting. To become an expert, you need to be always learning and improving your skills.

The perception that you'll do it well anyway when you like it is just an illusion.

Let's say, I like eating and I eat quite a lot; that doesn't mean I can just become a food guru and know how to analyze the quality of food and write good reviews for restaurants and dishes. To know how to rate foods, I have to learn the basic of what makes up good quality of food. I need to study the nature of different kinds of food like seafood, meat and vegetables etc. and understand the different types of cooking methods. I also have to learn the word usage and tone when writing a review for public to read.

Becoming an expert is one thing, becoming successful is another thing. To succeed, you need a pinch of luck too besides working hard.

What you do gotta be able to connect with what the world needs.

To be successful in anything, you need to get to the overlapped sweet spot of the three aspects: what you care, what you can do and what the world needs (where a bit of luck maybe needed).

Don't get turned off, luck doesn't play everything here! When you do enough research to understand what the world needs and try to think about how you can utilize your strengths, you will meet that sweet spot. Making the seem-to-be uncontrollable factor controllable is definitely possible.

Now you understand that merely passion is not enough to lead you to success, what to do next?

Make what you care a Focus Foundation.

After you've figured out what you care about most, make that your focus foundation.((Ken Sundheim: Does Passion Guarantee Success)) Being passionate about something can be a kind of motivation to make things easier because it helps you focus on what you want and care about most.

> Passion fuels resilience and provides you with the ambition to learn and strive to become more competent at what you do. Most importantly than anything else, it affords you the ability to focus.

When you're clear about the very thing you want, you know what things are actually distractions that stop you from reaching your goal.

Learn not just what you care about, but what's around that too.

When you've got your focus, try to map out the skills you need to get better at that.

Steve Jobs loved design so much that he took a calligraphy class just for the fun of it. He believed that the dots would connect in the future, all he did was to follow his heart to learn and let himself exposed to all the related stuff he was interested in.

To kickstart mapping out the skills you need, try to get yourself a skill chart. This is suggested in Jon Westenberg's framework to keep track of your skills learning progress after finding what you want to do.((Jon Westenberg: The Westenberg Framework))

It's easy, you just have to create a table with these columns:

- A column that lists the skills you have to learn
- A column for Research
- A column for Action
- A column for Progress

I changed the table a bit by adding one more column called "Target" to make the objective even clearer to me:

	A	B	C	D	E
	Skill	Target	Research	Action	Progress
1					
2	Copywriting skill	Increased click rate for copy I write	https://www.quick	Headline writing practice	3/1 tried 30 different sets of headling writing 3/2 wrote up 10 spinning on one topic
3			https://www.quick	Accumulate a list of powerful words	3/3 got 70 strong positive emotions stored
4			https://www.quick	Connect 2 ideas in 1 short sentence	
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					

Research and write down the things you need to do in the "Action" column and estimate how far you are from taking up the skill in the "Progress" column.

When you have the learning plan ready, apply that course you need, get yourself the tools required and kickstart learning and practicing.

Aspire to make a difference in the world with your strengths.

When you've become really good at what you care about, you can start to think about the connection between your strengths and the world's needs.

You're good at something and you need the world to know. The best way to do that is to find out what the world wants and needs most at the moment and connect that with your strengths.

Steve Jobs thought the world needed some different technology to make life easier. Technology used to be so inconvenient, everything was too big to carry around. So he created ipod-nano, ipod touch and ipad.

Success is way to go, but you can start right now.

Passion alone doesn't guarantee success. But if you've already got your passion, that's good enough to make that your foundation and motivation to keep moving.

Start mapping out the skills you need and take actions. Instead of passively letting your passion wander around, be proactive and do something that will push you forward.

We Say What We Won't Do but Say It Anyway

Every day we say a lot about what we want and will do.

"I want to pet a cat."

"I want to buy a house for my parents."

"I don't want to be single anymore."

"I will love you no matter what."

"I will work harder in the future."

It's easy to make plans for the future. And we make resolutions all the time. Consider that a full 80% of resolutions fail by the second week of February.((Business Insider: 80% of New Year's resolutions fail by February — here's how to keep yours)) And that a vast majority of relationships (plus many marriages) end as well with break-ups or divorce. The best intentions and the best-laid plans generally speaking end in failure.

No one intended to lie

In general, people make these kinds of promises or resolutions with the best intentions. **They don't want to fail**; if anything, they want desperately to be right, to improve themselves, and to make their friends and family happy. So even if a resolution doesn't work out, when they utter them, it's far from a lie.
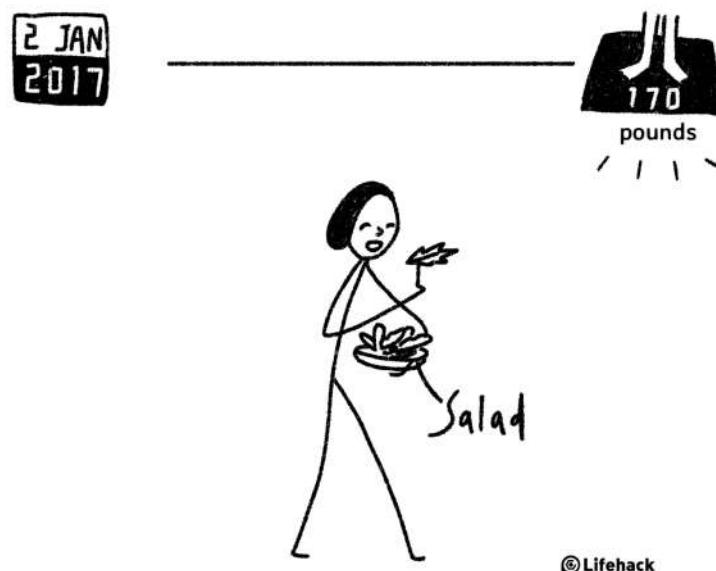
© Lifehack

People often speak without thinking. They say what comes to mind, but without really thinking it through. And what usually comes to mind is wishful thinking - the ideal result, not what's possible and practical. It's tempting to fantasize about a beautiful and perfect future: a good romantic relationship, to have the approval and respect of your parents, and to have a successful career.
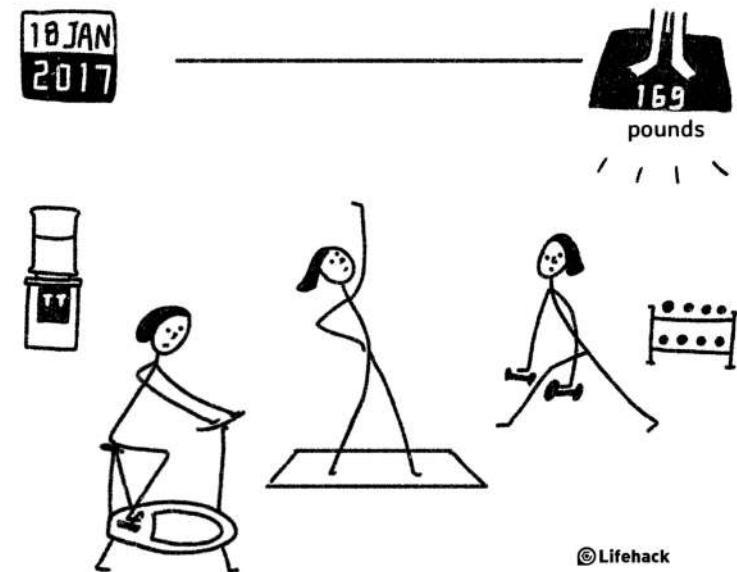
But how to get what you want is not always clear to you in the moment you utter it. It's hard to see beyond just the easy, idealized image. The challenges you may come across, the disappointments and sadness you may face - none of that is anywhere to be seen in a daydreaming mind.

Wishful thinking often end in crushing disappointment
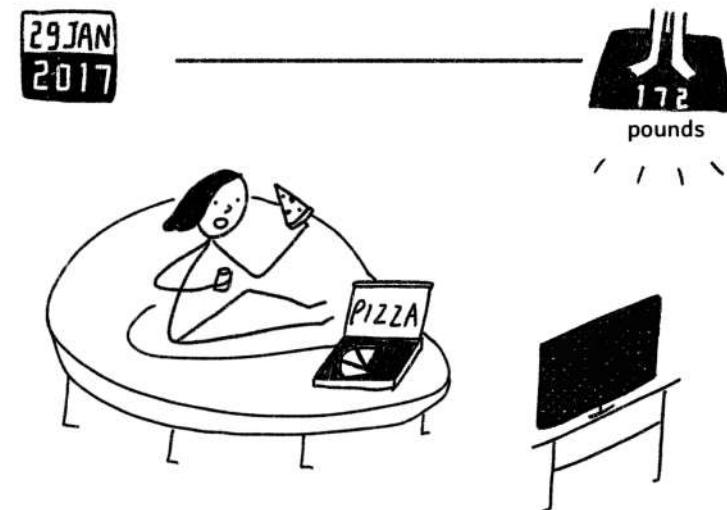
The problem is this. Wishful thinking and fantasies will only end in disappointment if you don't follow through. You disappoint your friends, your family, your boss, and - most importantly - yourself. This can really take a toll on your own psyche and sense of self-worth.
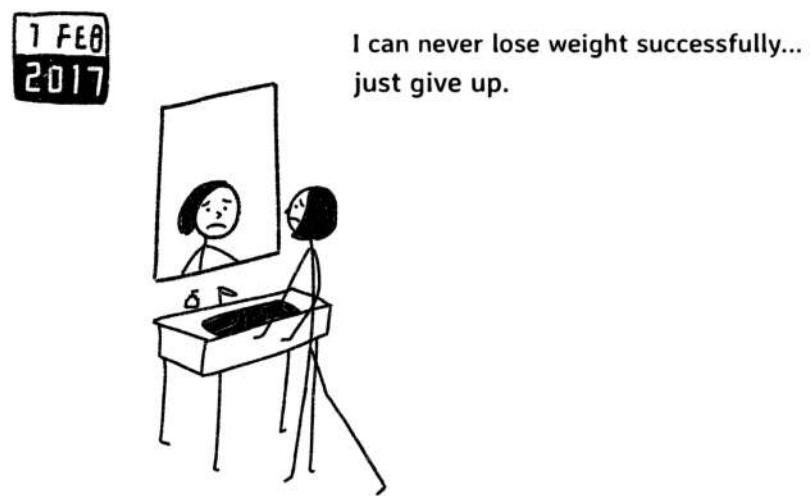
At a personal level, you'll have so many unfulfilled dreams and goals. This is an incredibly common situation for people everywhere. As a teenager, you might have dreamed of what your life would be like as an adult: happily married and with a successful and high-earning career by the time you're 25. But these are two seriously challenging goals that take planning and effort. Many people find themselves alone and in a dead-end job - rather than a career - wondering where they went wrong.

29 JAN 2017 — 172 pounds

PIZZA

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1 FEB 2017

I can never lose weight successfully... just give up.

©Lifehack

On an interpersonal level, making empty promises is hurtful and damaging to relationships. Friendship and healthy family relationships are built on trust. People who want to be your friend take you at your word and expect you to follow through. If you tell your friends that you'll "be there for them," but never pick up the phone, they will be hurt and no longer want to hang out. The same is true for family or even professional relationships. You might find it tempting to tell your boss that you'll finish a major project "by the end of the week," without considering whether this is plausible. If you are unable to complete the task in the timeframe that you set, it's not easy to regain your boss's trust.
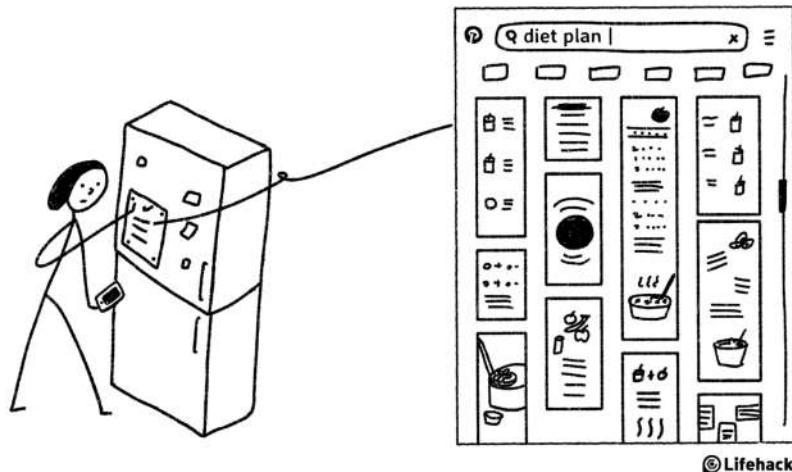
Keep what you want to yourself

It's vital to be clear about what you want. Notice when people around you are prone to saying "I want ___" and "I don't want ____."

Kids are very prone to saying all their wants out loud, partly because they don't have the independence and resources to get it themselves. This is why children and young people are often vague about what they want in the future. They have lots of wants without a concrete plan on how to get them.

This is one of the challenges of being an adult. As you gain the practical ability to provide for yourself, and as you learn from your mistakes, it's more and more important to be clear about **how you plan to get what you want**.

Plan

Practice visualizing plans to attain your goals. For example, you might want a pet - everyone shares pictures of their dogs and cats on Instagram! But before you go out to adopt one at the shelter, make sure you visualize all the things you have to do to take care of your pet. Pet-ownership involves: cleaning up after it, house-training it, taking it to the vet, walking it, buying it food, and making sure that it gets plenty of stimulation and exercise.

If you want or need a car, think about how much you need to save to purchase the car, the cleaning and maintenance costs, how to pay for regular car insurance, parking costs, et cetera.

Execution

If you really want something, don't just say it. **Plan for it and do it**. Create conditions that make what you want inevitable. Do small things consistently and make it a habit. You'll amaze yourself and your friends if you constantly work on attaining your goals.

It's easy to make or break promises. Set yourself apart from others by being reliable, deliberate, and thoughtful. Match your intentions with planning and action, and you'll find that you're happier with yourself and that your relationships are enriched.

Dismissing Sadness Will End up Making You Sadder

No one wants to be unhappy. We can mostly accept this as an universal truth. We often actively seek to avoid unhappiness even though it does come for all of us: breakups, school failings, disappointments in personal relationships, frustrations at work.

In the last 5-10 years especially, there's been an increasing amount of discussion about happiness, the importance of happiness, how to seek happiness, where to locate happiness, and anything else you can think of. The self-help industry is massive -- about $11 billion in the U.S. alone.((Brandon Gaille: 19 Self Improvement Industry Statistics and Trends)) When Disney modernized their theme parks a few years ago, they even called the project "reinventing happiness."((Fast Company: The Messy Business Of Reinventing Happiness)) It's on many minds, and you can find the topic in dozens of TED Talks.

This approach is problematic.

As writer Emily Esfahani Smith has pointed out in a TED Talk, the focus should be *less* on happiness and *more* on finding some degree of meaning in your life. Meaning is a mix of purpose and behaviors with intent; it's akin to finding your passion and yourself.

One of the problems with this whole discussion is the interplay between sadness and happiness. In a world without sadness, there can't be happiness either. It's just a straight line of emotion. How would you even know you're happy if you've never experienced being sad?

Happiness is relative. Think about it in terms of peaks:

Why is this a peak? Only because of a difference in height between this and everything around. Flat ground isn't a peak, correct?

Happiness and sadness work the same way. Without one, the other can't be defined.

When you avoid sadness, then, you reduce happiness in your life too. Life is ultimately about experiencing different aspects and locations. Avoiding sadness often means avoiding experiences. As you avoid sadness, you paradoxically also avoid happiness -- and you drown your thinking in things that may not actually happen.

A better approach is to think about life this way...

Perfection is essentially unattainable, as is any form of "truly perfect happiness."

This entire concept is called "**The Progress Principle**". Celebrating small wins helps you create your own system of instant gratification. Your brain needs to feel happy. And it needs to feel happy often. By looking at life as a journey instead of a short-term goal, you start to see the bigger picture and see the ups and downs as part of the progress.

Ups and downs are part of the journey

No one has a perfect life. Everyone has their own challenges and problems.

When you feel negative, you're focusing on the current level while the peak level is yet to come. You need to keep your sights on the extended curve.

Monitor your emotions and rack up small wins along the way

When you reach a disappointment in life, it's likely you only see it as a big fluctuation. But in the long-run, it's a small dip on an upward-trending pathway.

Be aware of your everyday emotions, you will realize that you're happier on some days and sadder on others. A bad day happens only occasionally. Instead of focusing on the unpleasant moment right now, flash back your memory to when you feel happier. This memory keeps you going during your down times.

Getting started with the Progress Principle

You can start by tracking your emotions. This will increase self-awareness.

You can also write down your achievements every day, or do a "3-1" model where you write down 3 positive things and 1 constructively negative thing. At the end of a week, you have 21 positives and 7 things to work on. It gives you a good baseline for next week's progress.

When You Can't See Yourself Moving Forward, Keep Moving

Have you ever tried reaching a goal that was labor and time intensive such as, losing a substantial amount of weight, finishing an educational program, or training for a marathon? If so, you understand the struggle of chasing a long-term goal.

As humans, we are hardwired to seek and engage in activities that provide us instant gratification.

We operate on what psychologists call the 'pleasure principle'.((Entrepreneur:The Psychology of Instant Gratification and How It Will Revolutionize Your Marketing Approach)) The pleasure principle is the primary force that compels human beings to seek immediate satisfaction of their needs, wants, and urges. Pursuing long-term goals is particularly difficult because it provides no immediate reward. It places us in a posture of waiting. When gratification is significantly delayed--which is directly opposed to human nature--motivation wanes and effort decreases. In order to win, you must work hard, sacrifice and more importantly--wait.

Understanding and coping with the inevitable motivational slump that accompanies most substantial achievements is critical to sticking with the process and achieving your goals. According to the University of Scranton, a whopping 92% of people do not fulfill their New Year's Resolution.((Statistic Brain: New York Resolution Statistics)) There are a variety of reasons we don't stick with the quest to reach our goals but the common thread underlying why we quit is simply the lack of motivation. Staying motivated is the key to keep you on the path to accomplishing your goal--especially when your progress slows or stalls.

Pursuing a long-term goal is a counter-intuitive endeavor that is directly opposed to our human instincts.

Instead of fighting this process head-on, it's better to adjust the process to flow in tandem with our urges and natural inclinations. How, you ask?

It's actually pretty easy. Below are three simple ways that can help keep you motivated and engaged while pursuing your long-term goals:

1. Always celebrate small wins, no matter how small they are.

Celebrating small wins helps you create your own system of instant gratification. Your brain needs to win. And it needs to win often. The book, _The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work((A_mazon: The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work)) proves how powerful celebrating small victories can be. Authors, Theresa Amabile and Steve Kramer of the Harvard Business Review conducted a study of 238 employees from seven different companies. The study measured the impact that acknowledging small victories has on long-term and sustained success.

These researchers made a significant discovery. They found that tracking and recognizing efforts of small, daily achievements enhanced workers motivation, increased positive emotions and favorable perceptions of the organization, of their work, and their colleagues. Psychologists have found that any accomplishment--no matter how small--activates the reward circuitry of our brains. When this pathway is opened, key chemicals are released giving us a feeling of achievement and pride.

2. Track your progress, and review every milestone.

Keeping track of your progress is beneficial for several reasons. First, it allows you to see your progress overtime. Second, it allows you to accurately pinpoint what works and what doesn't. Logging your journey also counters bad habits, slip ups and lack of motivation. Frequent feedback increases your chances of hitting a specific goal and helps keep you on track and adjust when necessary.

Experts suggest that you find a way to formally track your progress and to set and celebrate small benchmarks. Using free apps such as CoachMe is an excellent way to track your habits and celebrate change. You may also want to conduct a weekly review((Selfication: How to Conduct a Weekly Planning Session)) to assess where you are and celebrate all of the small wins of the week. Tracking your progress is also a great way to find and mitigate triggers and hindrances that impede your progress.

3. Stop punishing yourself for slip ups and small failures.

We all fail, backslide and lose ground when trying to achieve something great. It is a part of the process. Instead of fixating on your failures, learn from them and hone in on your successes. Learn to forgive yourself, pick yourself up and keep moving forward. So, you ate three donuts for breakfast, woke up late and missed your gym session or failed a test. That one incident does not determine your success--regroup and keep it moving.

Sustaining your mental fortitude and tenacity during a long and arduous process is difficult. Celebrating and leveraging all the things you do well and all of the successes along the way is the key to your success.

The Magic of Marking down Your Mood Every Day

Let me ask you a question: what emotions did you experience today? Were you happy? Sad? Frustrated or anxious? Recalling your emotions from the last 24 hours is pretty easy but what about yesterday? Or last Friday? It starts to be a bit hard. What if I'm asking you about last month?

Emotions affect us every minute and every second. When you feel anxious at work, you're more likely to make mistakes and it's harder to come up with great ideas. When you're frustrated for unknown reasons, you lose motivation and would just like to lie on your bed doing nothing. When you're angry with someone, you unconsciously treat others angrily too. Losing track of emotions means losing track of all these. You'll never know the reasons and patterns and hence never be to solve the issues and improve the situation.

Emotions should be approached like money

People treat money with so much importance yet they can be so dismissive of their emotions and how they affect them. When we have less money than we'd like, we'll automatically tune our spending and keep track of where it's going and how much we have - adapting our spending habits accordingly. In other words, if one doesn't keep track then there's no way to tune and improve it.
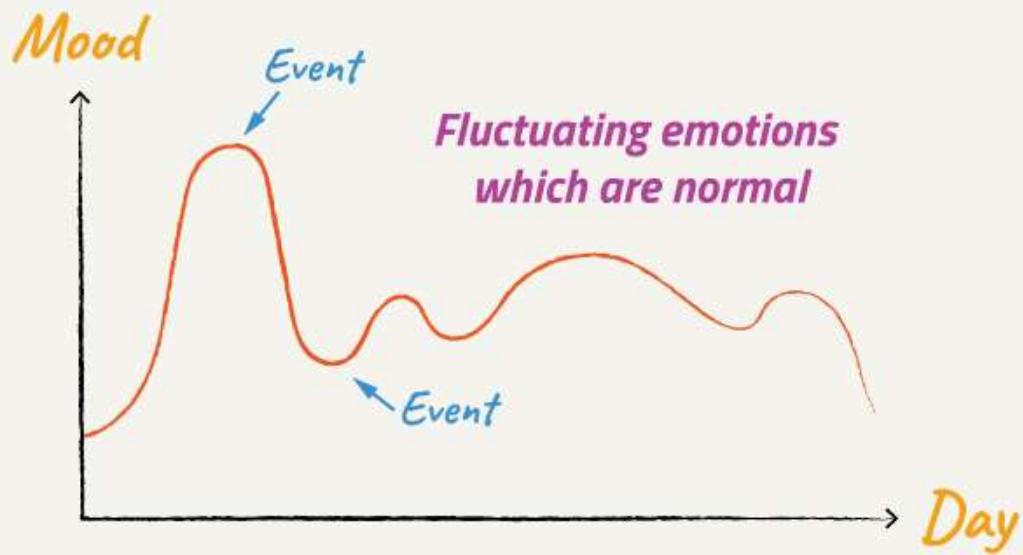
This is how emotions should be approached. By putting the same importance on how we feel, acknowledging why we feel a certain way and what's caused it, we're able to tune better into identifying and handling emotions in a more positive way.

3 things to mark down every day
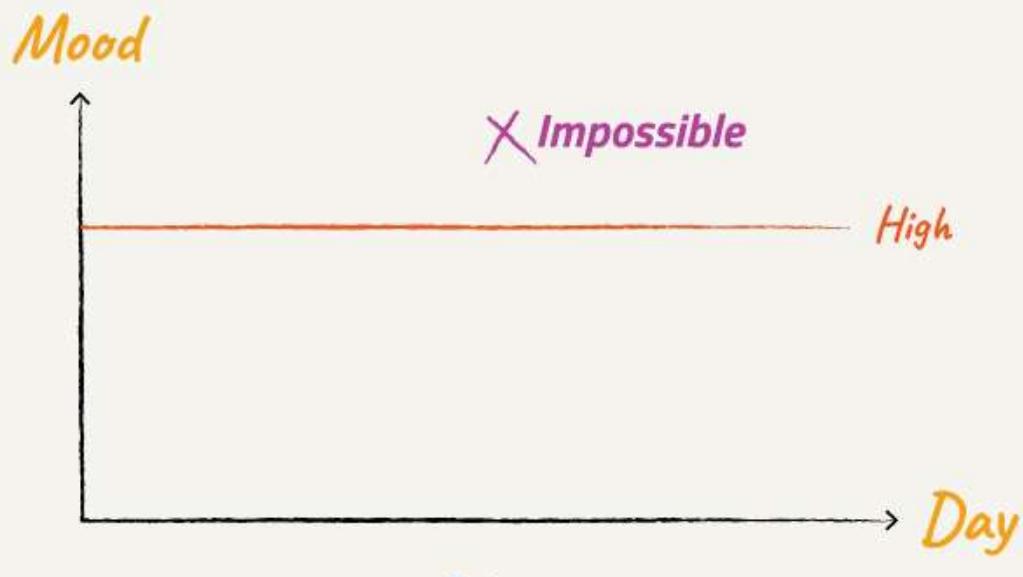
Throughout any given day, write down the following:

1. Your general emotion of the day
2. The events of the day
3. The link between your emotion and what happened
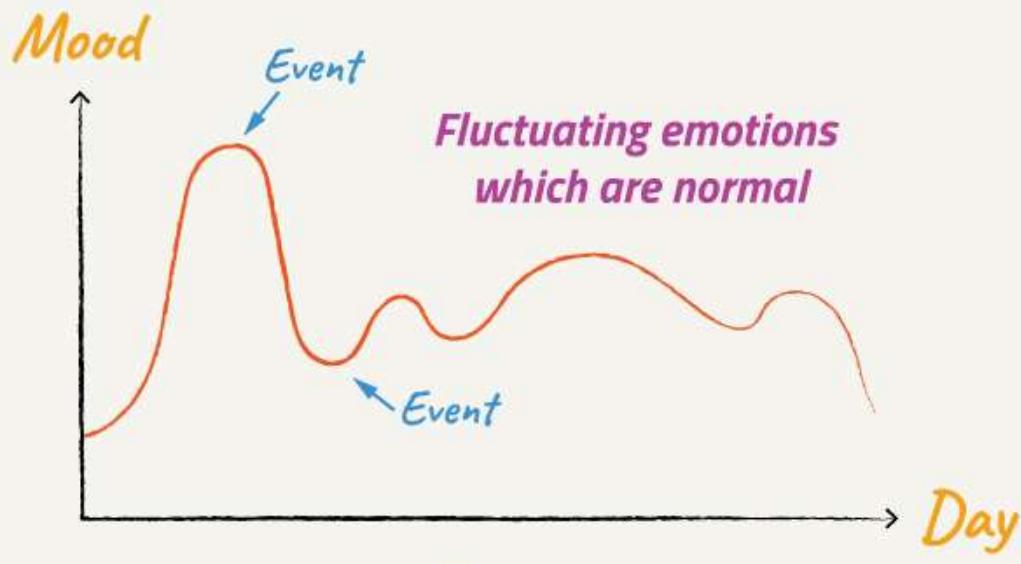
You'll notice your emotions fluctuate on different days. This is completely normal. After all, we're human and it can be difficult to control what happens to us and how we respond to them so it's important to give yourself a bit of understanding.

Because of this, it's impossible to always maintain a happy mood so don't put pressure on yourself to consistently feel positive emotions.
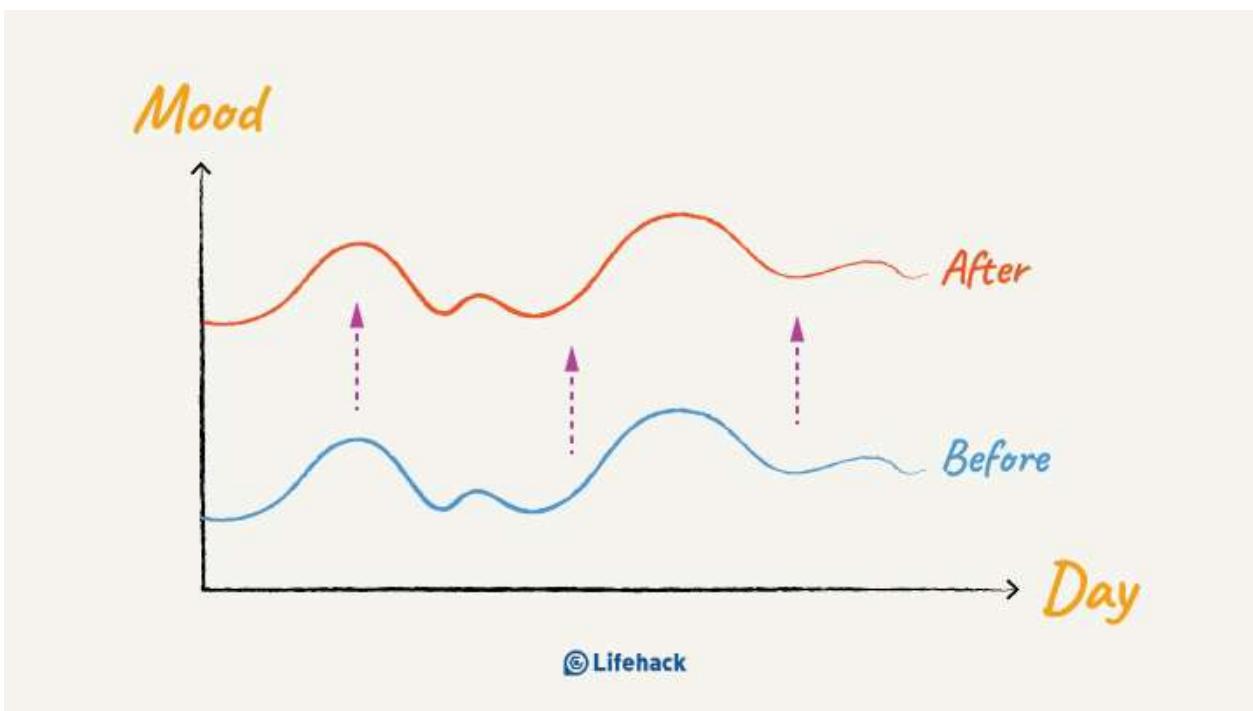
Once you start tracking your moods and the events of the day you can start to see the connections between them. Reviewing your emotions means being able to see what exactly makes you happy, anxious or sad. Youmight not know rainy days make you sullen before. You might not be aware initiating a greeting to your neighbor can make you feel energetic for the rest of the day until you mark all these down.

You can use excel or mood apps such as Mr Mood which can help you see correlations more clearly. Try it out for a few days but keep it general - try to not rate your mood by the hour as it's more likely to fluctuate in smaller time frames. Instead rate your overall mood of the day along with the events that occurred.

Over time, although fluctuations still exist, you'll see your mood is boosted overall as you cultivate more positive experiences and curb negative ones once you identify what they are. Previously bad weather made you feel sad, now you still feel a bit sad but you know how to make fun out of it by staying at home doing things you've always wanted to do but postponed. Previously you would only be happy when your manager noticed your efforts and recognized you. Now you realize how important recognition is to you after marking down your mood every day. And you've decided to recognize yourself whenever you think you're worth it, even if no one noticed your efforts.

> "If you want to change the visible, first, change the invisible."

You'll find that taking care of your invisible emotions actually means taking care of every aspect of your life. That's the magic.

The Fear of Missing Out vs The Joy of Missing Out

FOMO, the Fear Of Missing Out was added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2013. It has been a popular concept for the last decade or so—largely because of the corresponding rise of social media.

Many people are now linking FOMO and social media but FOMO isn't a new concept. It's been around since almost the dawn of time.

Before social media, you were afraid of missing out. The insecurity of being left out was strong when a friend didn't invite you to a party, when you didn't understand an inside joke of others, or when someone knew something you had never heard of.

Humans Are Designed to Fear Missing Out

Consistent inclusion makes people feel safe. Humans were designed to live together in communities.

Imagine you are on a scout team. The scout team goes into a jungle, but leaves you behind. As they build a camp together, you're left alone. How do you feel?

Probably lonely. You feel as if you're not needed and easy to forget about. You have no value. Because you're alone with the elements, you understand there's a degree of danger to the situation. It's scary.

Sticking together is safe. Being left out is insecure. This perception is reinforced when people have got in touch with the social media. Social media has made this worse but it didn't create it. Now people have a desire to not get left out both digitally and in the real world, that's how the problem has compounded.

Chasing for Inclusion Intensifies the Fear

FOMO creates an overwhelming situation socially. If you seek to never be left out, you will always pursue friends' gatherings, every single piece of information, all the inside jokes, etc. It becomes too much. Your energy drains, and you lose time and effort towards other projects, relationships, and work. The only thing you get from chasing an end to FOMO is a sense of instant gratification for being "in the know" or "never left out." That chase, however, has no end in sight. It's exhausting.

It also creates a context where your self-esteem can become based on the approval of others, which is dangerous. Most people don't have the attention to pay to the entire social sphere, online or in-person, so you'll always be left out of events or info here and there because it would be impossible to always be included. But if your self-esteem is tied up in others' approval, those moments when you are left out will hurt even more. You can begin to question your basic value.

The Joy of Missing Out

Think on life like this: how worthy you are depends on two things. (1) is what you do and (2) how you contribute. Your self-worth cannot be tied to missing out on the events of others. Think about what you want for yourself, not what others want for themselves.

When you're clear about what you want, the things you miss out on tend to be less important. What you have missed out will no longer hold on to you.

To experience the joy of missing out, you need to realize that your own worth comes from within. You are the only person you can control. Approve yourself and make the security come from within. The fear of missing out will no longer haunt you when you feel safe with what you have within.

One of the first rules of building self-esteem is to focus on improving yourself but never expect perfection. You need to start weaning yourself off your bad habits and onto new ones. View life through a prism of "progress not perfection." Perfection is unattainable for almost all of us. But progress at the aspects of life you care about—relationships, health, your profession, financial literacy, etc.—is possible. Try to track where you are week-to-week and month-to-month. As you see progress, you will begin to feel better about yourself. Try saving $10 one week, then $15 the next week, then $20. In a year, you'll be trying to save $500+ per week. Progress.

As you build self-esteem through these methods and take care of *you*, the need for FOMO will slip away.

The Ugly Truth About Comments and Reviews

How much do you feel you're influenced on a daily basis? Social media opens us up to comparison of others but what about our opinions? If you're presented with a video or article, it's hard not to read the plethora of comments posted underneath before we've even clicked on it.

Many times people read movie reviews on IMDB to decide whether or not they will watch a film. And many times people meticulously read customer reviews and ratings on Amazon before deciding to buy something.

In essence, **we're being made to create an opinion before we've had the chance to make our own**. Most of the time it's alarmingly unconscious.

The Dangers of Reading Comments and Reviews

While we think we're reading comments to make a balanced and informed decision, we don't take into account the intentions behind another person's comments.

Most of us only leave comments if we strongly agree or disagree with something, meaning that around 90% of the comments you read are left by either very loyal supporters or people who are emotionally charged in a negative way. Therefore, we need to take into account that **these extreme opinions tend to be biased and not constructive.**

Emotions can drive our decisions. They can easily interject into our daily situations quickly and with little thought. If we get a positive emotion (excitement or enthusiasm) or negative emotion (anxiety or worry) in any given circumstance where a decision can be made, we are highly influenced by that emotion.

A study was conducted in 2003 where a group of American citizens were asked to read either a fear-inducing news story about anthrax mail threats, or an anger-inducing news story about Middle Eastern nations celebrating the 9/11 attacks. The research found people who were put into an angry state saw the world as 'less risky' and therefore supported harsher measures against suspected terrorists.((The Atlantic: The Best Headspace for Making Decisions))

This illustrates that, when we read seemingly harmless yet influential comments, we really have no idea about the commenter or their emotional state while writing their opinion. **We can easily read them as authentic comments but in reality this is a myth.**

An Unknown Conspiracy

How genuine are the comments you read? The opportunity to make money is unfortunately allowing businesses to create the power to alter our opinions and decisions.

Many companies actually employ people to create fake comments in order to influence a customer's decision. Even worse, some employ people to write negative comments about their competitors in order to attack their reputation.

Don't underestimate the power and knowledge big guns have on how to strategically sway customer's ideas and decisions through simple reviews and ratings. While it's not yet illegal, watchdogs are becoming increasingly alarmed at the amount of fake reviews currently out there on all major sites. It's worrying when many of us trust what we're reading and even make big purchases based on seemingly positive reviews.

How Not to Be Manipulated by Comments and Reviews

We need to be very vigilant when it comes to comments. Being aware of either fake comments or understanding the possible emotion used by the writer at that moment it was written is a first step.

Don't Be Quick to React to Comments

You may read a comment you don't agree with and often in this case, anger may rise up. But commenting in this state is only adding to a biased view. How many times do our emotions cause us to act in a certain way only to feel differently once we've stepped back and evaluated things?

It's best to react with as little emotion as possible or make them irrelevant to your decision. It could be an opinion you feel extremely offended by or a review you just don't agree with. While your opinion is important, take time out before you respond so your emotions are more balanced. This way you won't add to the influence of emotional charge.

Be Critical of the Comments You Read

You may read a harsh and angry review about a product you're thinking of purchasing but try to read between the lines.

Is there a specific reason or circumstance that has influenced their negative comment? Perhaps it's something that wouldn't apply to you. Try to read other comments the poster has written to see if they have a tendency to write negatively. In other words, **step back, take what they've said into account but be aware of it's overall influence.**

Others' opinions are based on personal and emotional perspectives. While some may be valid, it's best to use them as a reference only. Doing solid research especially when we're investing money into buying something, is always a must to get a thorough and balanced view on the product.

The sad truth is we can miss out on great things if we're influenced too much by negative comments or reviews. Instead of basing a movie on it's IMDB rating or choosing a book on Amazon with the most stars, choose the genre you like and find out for yourself. It's how we find those hidden gems that add value to our lives.

Reviews and Comments Are for Reference Only
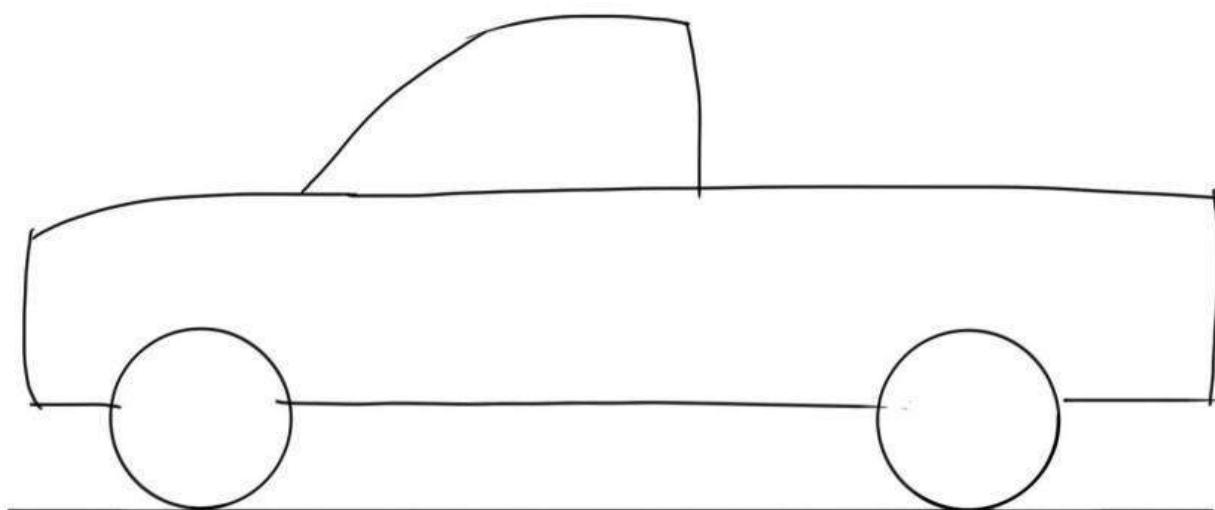
At the end of the day, we need to be more aware of how much we're influenced by others. Be mindful of the comments and reviews and don't always take them at face value.

Our general life experiences and emotions can dictate how we react in any moment so the only opinion that matters will be yours - find out for yourself and form your own opinion. What doesn't work for others may work for you.

Our Minds Can't Be Trusted

How often do you ride on a car? Even if you don't have your own car, you must have seen one. I want to start this piece with a small challenge for you. Using only your memory, recall it in your mind a car you often see.

Okay, I see the wheels, the window, and the overall car frame. Does it look anything like this?

Oh but wait, what about the headlights and tail lights? Where's the handle for opening the doors? And where're the mirrors?

Why would we miss so many of those things? Don't we all have a clear idea what a car is like?

We believe that we know way more than we actually do.

Yes we do. In a study conducted at Yale((Steven Sloman, a professor at Brown & Philip Fernbach, a professor at the University of Colorado, The Knowledge Illusion: Why We Never Think Alone)), graduate students were asked about their understanding in everyday devices like toilets. Most thought that they were familiar with the device, only after they were asked to explain step-by-step how the device works did they find out how ignorant they were. Toilets are more complicated than they look.

We believe that we know way more than we do because most of the time, we only need to rely on others' expertise to operate something. Take the bicycle and toilets as examples, we don't really need to figure out how the whole thing works in order to operate them. As written by the authors of The Knowledge Illusion: Why We Never Think Alone,

> "One implication of the naturalness with which we divide cognitive labor is that there's "no sharp boundary between one person's ideas and knowledge, and those of other members of the group"

Very often, our knowledge and beliefs are actually someone elses' without us even realizing it. Maybe you've already started to be more aware of this fact especially when the social media has such a great impact on our daily lives these days.

When deep understanding is not always required, biases arise.

The tendency that people embrace only information that supports their own beliefs is commonly known as "confirmation bias", and it is dangerous. When we believe what we think is always right, our faulty thinking will harm the truth and disrupt our growth.

Did everyone really understand the political situations in the US before they voiced out their opinions? And it's pretty obvious that not everyone in the UK understood the whole Brexit thing before they voted for it, right? These are just some of the many examples of how others' beliefs and knowledge got easily spread over the internet and people just picked up those thoughts without further understanding the truth.

Business journalists often suffer from the confirmation bias. In the books The Art of Thinking Clearly((Role Dobelli: The Art of Thinking Clearly)), there's an example about a statement "Google is so successful because the company nurtures a culture of creativity", and how once this idea goes on paper, journalists only need to support the statement by mentioning other same successful companies without seeking disconfirming evidence. No more different perspectives, people will always see just one tip of the iceberg.

When winning becomes more important than reasoning, chaos come.

On the other hand, when presented with someone else's argument, we tend to be more skeptical; and there comes the term "myside bias".

In an experiment performed by a cognitive scientist Hugo Mercier,((Cognitive scientists Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber: The Enigma of Reason (Harvard)) participants had to answer some questions, and later they were presented their own answers but were made to believe those were others' answers. They became a lot more critical about the answers than when they were simply asked to modify their answers to be better.

In some situations, when winning seems to be more beneficial, reasoning clearly becomes unimportant to most of us. And this makes us more blinded than ever to spot out our own weaknesses.

To think more clearly, "murder your darlings".

"Murder your darlings" is the literary critic Arthur Quiller-Couch's advice((Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch: On the Art of Writing)) for writers who are reluctant to cut their cherished redundant sentences in their works. We can apply this concept to how we think too.

To fight against biases, let go of your "cherished thoughts" that you have to be right, and set out to find disconfirming evidence of all your beliefs — whether they be relationships, political views or career objectives. The stronger you believe in something, the more you should seek out alternative views of it.

The rule of three

An even more effective way to overcome bias is using the rule of three((Benjamin L. Luippold, Ph.D.; Stephen Perreault, CPA, Ph.D.; and James Wainberg, Ph.D.: Overcome Confirmation Bias))— identify three potential causes of an outcome. In fact, the more possibilities you can come up with, the less biased you'd be towards any single outcome.

Say next time, if you see an outcome that isn't what you expect at work, instead of thinking it must be that irresponsible and careless guy who messed up the stuff, try to think of three potential causes: Maybe there're instructions missing at the beginning? Maybe the guy already did his job but something went wrong afterwards? Maybe it's something external that affected the outcome of this?

Thinking through alternative possibilities help unravel the unnecessary attachments we have to the "cherished" thoughts, so we can have a more complete picture of how things are. When you learn to "murder your darlings" and embrace different views, your horizon will be widened and you'll see a limitless world.

The Cost of Envy

In our competitive environment today, it's very easy to become envious of others' successes. In the startup field, there are always a few phenomenal individuals who bloom quickly in their respective industries. I know of one that produced an app that quickly gained 20 million users, and another that won several outstanding business awards and garnered lots of attention from the media. Another small startup quickly grew to have 200 employees.

When a colleague outperforms you, a friend has a bustling social life, or when someone has a seemingly perfect relationship, it is easy to turn to resentment.((Emotional Competency: Envy)) Most of the time, we don't admit to these feelings, but the green-eyed monster lurks beneath the surface.

Whether or not we'd like to admit it, we've all felt jealous of someone else in the past.

Competitive and jealous feelings are an adaptive strategy. Humans are naturally inclined to compare to others because it was essential to outperform others in order to survive. ((Psychology Today: Envy: The Emotion Kept Secret))

While it seems natural to become envious or resentful of others, the feeling does more harm than good.

Envy Costs Your Entire Mind

Envy interferes with people's ability to think and act. Instead of working on attaining a high level of success, it focuses a person's energy on what they lack.((Huffpost: How to Keep Jealousy and Envy From Ruining Your Life)) **An envious person is blind to their own progress since their only aim is to have what someone else already has.** Without benchmarks for their progress, envious individuals quickly lose their motivation altogether.

Those who worry about the final outcomes that others experience don't think about the journey that their competitors had to take to reach that level of success.((Fast Company: How To Turn Your Career Envy Into Motivation)) **Envious people are blind to their own strengths, and they're unable to see the weaknesses of rivals.**

If you spend your whole life envying others because you think they are more efficient, more easily promoted, or better at solving problems, you'll never become better. A person who wastes time worrying about others' successes will not be able to see his or her own

potential. Even when the envious person succeeds, he or she will likely still be so focused on the other person that there is little cause for celebration. The vicious cycle continues, and the envious individual never feels satisfied.

The reality is that there will always be someone smarter, better, or stronger. Enviousness condemns people to lead lives in which they constantly hope to have more. The green-eyed monster can never be satisfied. Intrinsic motivation for success yields better outcomes than resentment of others' accomplishments.

Cut the Chord and Stop Depending on Envy

I understand that even the most altruistic and optimistic among us may be tempted to envy others from time to time. When I face envy, I revisit my purpose and desire to succeed. I find motivation through grounding myself in my vision.

When I first started Lifehack, it was a struggle. This was during a time when the web was becoming exponentially popular each day, and lots of new companies were popping up everywhere to fill in the space. During that time I heard about a startup close by that quickly grew to fill a huge office. Their building had four floors, a fancy layout, a big canteen, and a rec room with a pool and a dartboard. Almost immediately I thought, "Wow! That sounds cool. I wish I could have those things too. It must be nice." I was impressed, but started to have that uncomfortable feeling comparing myself to this suddenly successful startup.

I could have allowed this feeling to fester, but instead **I turned inward to remember what was important to me**. I reminded myself that I am most interested in creating an environment that boosts productivity. Anything that doesn't increase productivity is superfluous, and could actually create distractions.

Then, I thought about the goals of my work. I want to create a product that has a positive influence on others. It doesn't matter whether my office space seems cool. What is truly important is how the work that we do in these offices can change lives.

My team doesn't need all those bells and whistles to create a fun work environment. My team members are fun and creative all on their own. If I spent all my time worrying about how big their offices were, I'd be upset with myself for not being able to offer them what that other startup has. I'd be too busy worrying about my feelings of guilt to push my mission forward.

When I focus on my aspirations and work to improve myself, it brings me closer to achieving my mission. **Knowing what I really want is the best motivation, and it wards off envy better than vain attempts to have what everyone else has.** There's just no reason for me to envy what others have because those things don't align with my vision for this company.

Freeing myself from the control of envy has liberated me from unrealistic and counter-productive desires. I can see the progress I've made as well as the areas in which I'd like to grow, and I allow my work to stand on its own merit instead of constantly comparing it to the work of others.

Not only is freeing oneself of envy critical for staying focused on what is important, it also makes life much more pleasant. Being able to applaud another person's success without having a negative reaction has led to more opportunities and partnerships than if that success had created an adversarial relationship.

When you start to covet the success of others, realign yourself with your vision, and recognize that we are all on a journey to become the greatest versions of ourselves.

The Surefire Way to Feel Unloved

Admit it, you feel good when other people think you're nice. Maybe you were complimented by a stranger saying that you had a nice outfit. You felt good about yourself and you were happy for the rest of the day.
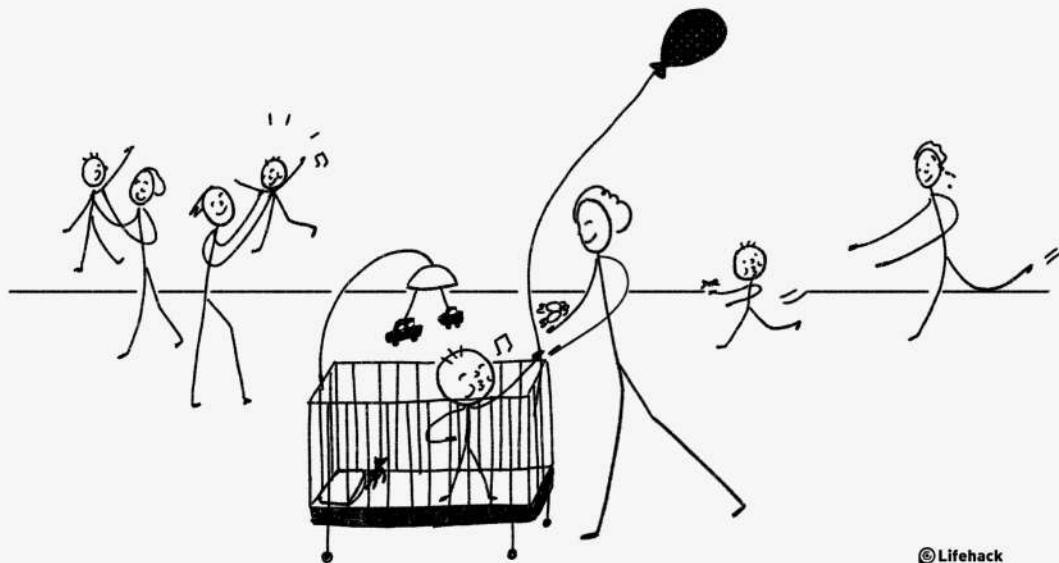
We all like to feel liked, whether by a stranger or a loved one. It makes you feel valued and that feeling can be addictive. But when the high wears off and you no longer have validation that someone thinks you're a good, sweet person, you may feel insecure and lacking. While wanting others to like you isn't in itself a bad thing, it can be like a disease when you feel that you constantly need to be liked by others.

Humans are wired to want to be liked.

It's human nature to seek approval from others. In ancient times, we needed acceptance to survive. Humans are social animals and we need to bond with others and form a community to survive. If we are not liked by others, we will be left out.
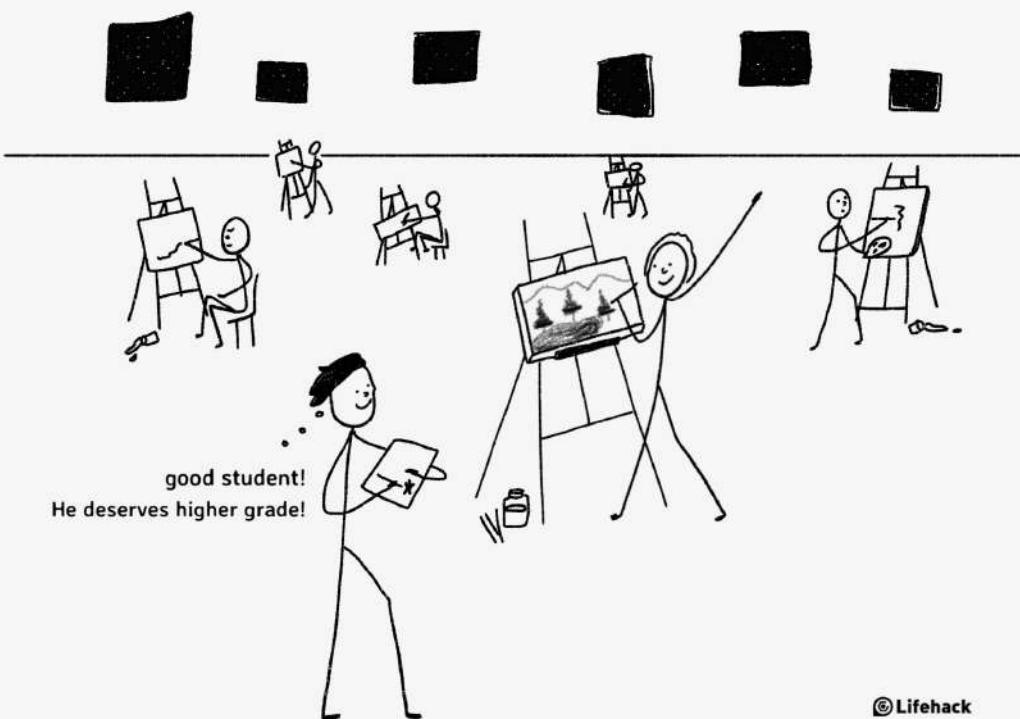
Babies are born to be cute and be liked by adults.

The large rounded head, big forehead, large eyes, chubby cheeks, and a rounded body. Babies can't survive without an adult taking care of them. It's vital for adults to find babies lovely to pay attention to them and divert energy towards them.((Science ABC: Why Do We Find Babies So Cute?))

Recognitions have always been given by others.

From the time you were a child, whether at school or at home, you have been receiving recognition from external parties. For instance, you received grades from teachers, and if you wanted something, you needed approval from your parents. We've learned to get what we want by catering to other people's expectations. Maybe you wanted to get a higher grade in art so you'd be more attentive in art classes than others to impress your teacher. Your teacher would have a generally good impression on you and would likely to give you a higher grade.

When you grow up, it's no different. Perhaps you are desperate to get your work done so you do things that your manager would approve. Or maybe you try to impress your date by doing things they like but you don't really like.
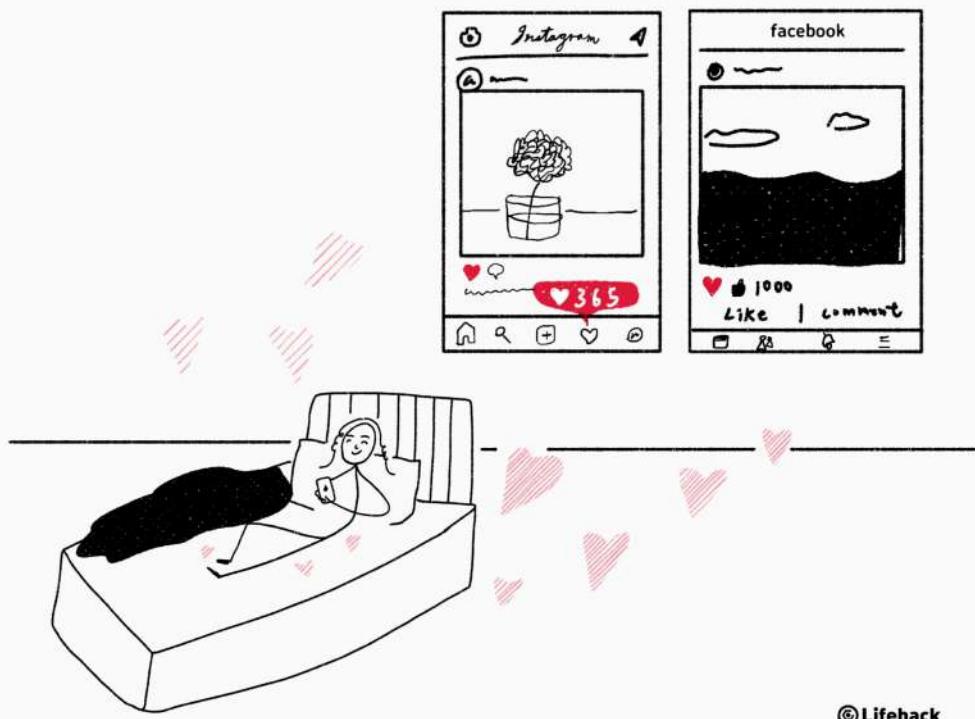
Facebook and Instagram have only made things worse. People posting their photos and sharing about their life on Instagram just to feels so good to get more likes and attention.

Being liked becomes essential to reaching desires.
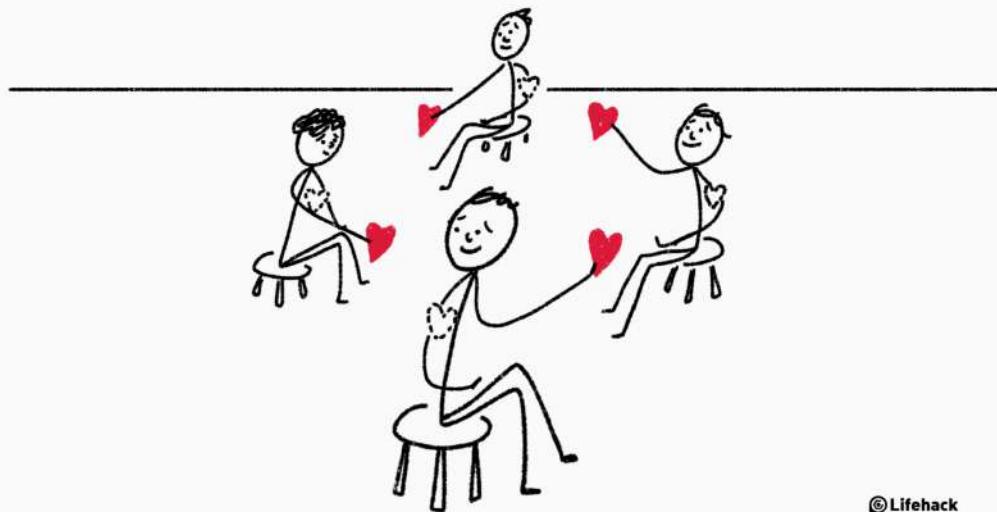
We start to get hyper focused on how others see us, and it's easy to imagine having the spotlight on you at all time. People see you and they take an interest in you. This feels good. In turn, you start doing more things that bring you more attention. It's all positive until you do something they don't like and you receive criticism. When this happens, you spiral because you've lost the feeling of acceptance.

But the reality is this is all just perception. Humans, as a species, are selfish. We are all just looking at ourselves; we only perceive others are giving us their focus. Even for those who please others are actually focusing on making themselves feel good. It's like an optical illusion for your ego.

The desire to be liked is an endless chase.

Aiming to please others in order to feel better will exhaust you because you can never catch up with others' expectation.

The ideal image will always change.
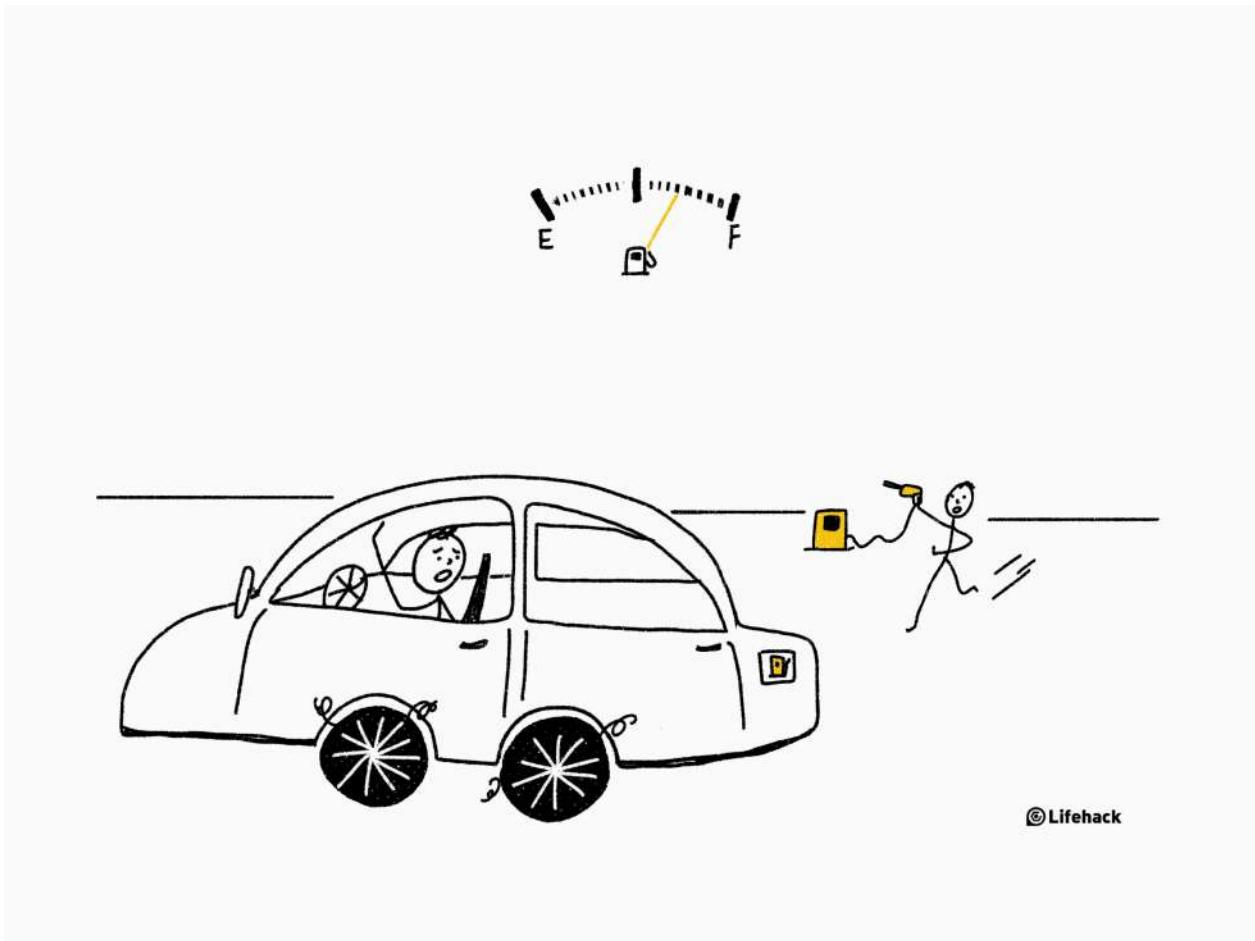
It used to be ideal to have a fair weight, a little bit fat was totally acceptable. Then it's ideal to be very slim. Recently we've seen "dad-bods" getting some positive attention. But this is already quickly changing. In fact, a recent article from Men's Health asked 100 women if they would date a guy who had a dad-bod, about 50% of women claimed to not care either way, only 15% exclusively date men with a "dad bod".((Mens' Fitness: We Asked 100 Women: Do you like guys who have 'dad bods'?))

People's expectations on you can be wrong.

Most people put their expectations on others based on what's right in the social norms, yet the social norms are created by humans in which 80% of them are just ordinary people according to the 80/20 rules.((Entrepreneur Journey: What Is The 80/20 Rule And Why It Will Change Your Life))
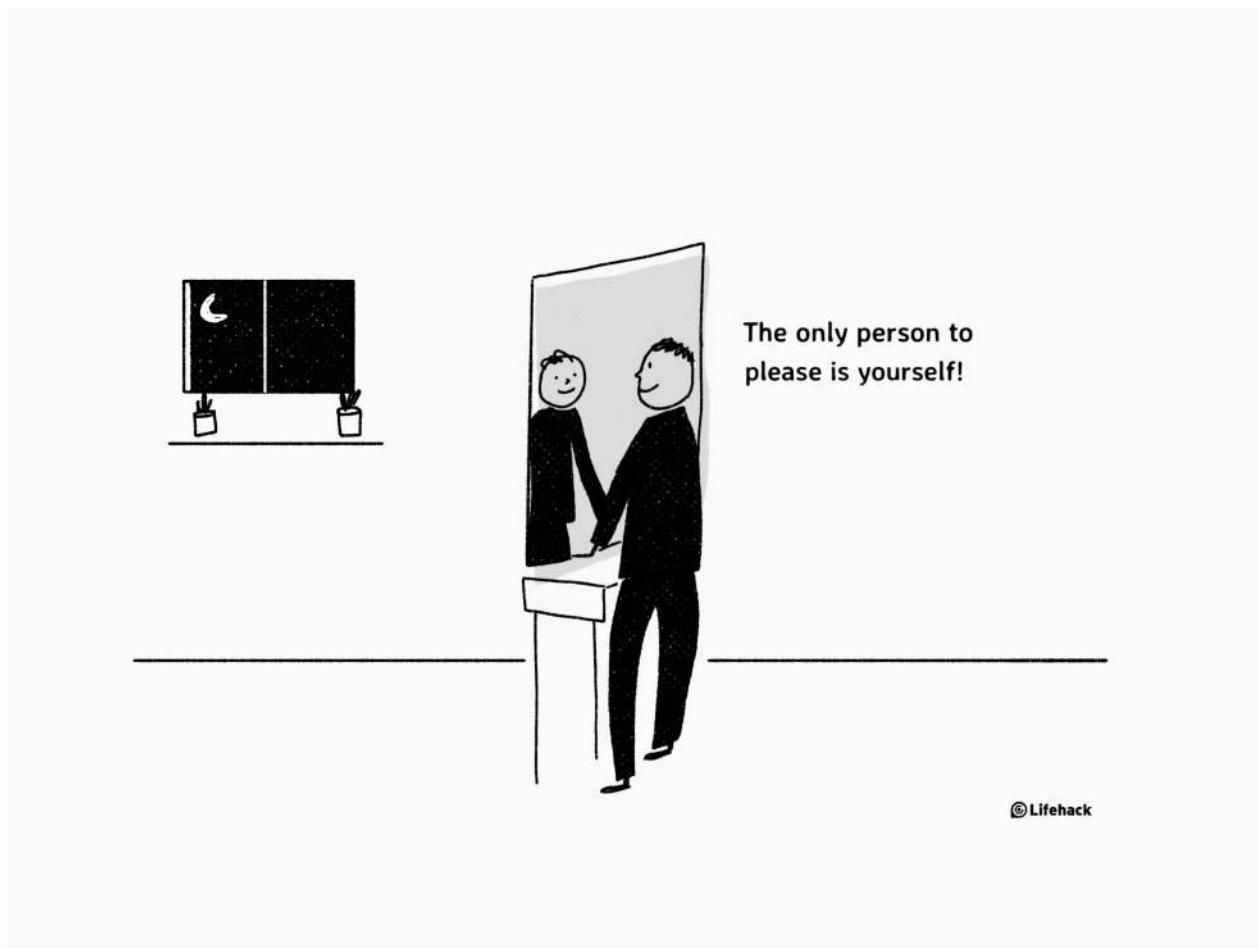
Think about it, every day, from the time you wake up to the time you go to sleep, you filter what you believe to be truth. If someone compliments you, you take it and add it to an idea of what the best version of yourself is. When someone criticizes you, even in a destructive way, you might accept it altogether, or add it to a list of things you're insecure about. When you absorb the wrong opinion from others, you will either sabotage your self-esteem or overestimate yourself by accepting all the good compliments and stop growing; or accepting all the destructive criticisms and sabotage your own self-esteem and happiness.

Others' desires are not the same as yours.

If you live your life as one long effort of trying to please other people, you will never be happy. You're always going to rely on others to make you feel worth living. This leads to total confusion when it comes to your personal goals; when there's no external recognition, you don't know what to live for.

The only person to please is yourself.

Think of others' approval as fuel and think of yourself as a car. When that fuel runs out, you can't function. This is not a healthy mindset.

In reality, we're human and we can create our own fuel. You can feel good based on how much you like yourself. When you do things to make you like yourself more, you can start to see a big change in your opinion. For example, if being complimented by others made you feel good and accepted, look in the mirror and compliment yourself. Say what you wish others would say about you.

Internal approval takes practice, but it's worth the effort. You have to re-train your own mind. Think of the dog who knows there is food when the bell rings, the reflex is hard wired into the dog.((Simply Psychology: Pavlov's Dogs)) We need our own triggers to reinforce the habit of internal approval too. Recognize yourself every day instead of waiting for people to do it for you.

Notice that when you start to focus on yourself and what to do to make yourself happy, others may criticize you. Since you've stopped trying to please others to meet their expectations, they may judge you for what you do. Be critical about what they say about you. They aren't always right but so are you. Everyone has blind spots. Let go of biased and subjective comments but be humble and open to useful advice that will improve you.
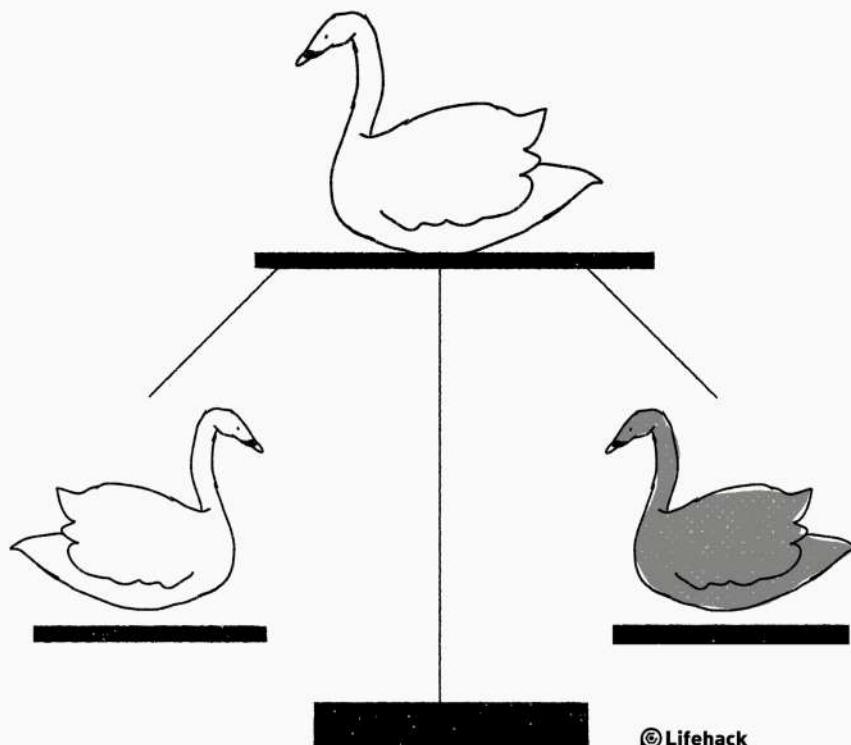
Remember that you are worth it, every day. It will take time to stop relying on others to make you feel important and worth something, but the sooner you start trying, the happier and healthier you will be.

Nobody Is Special, and That's Great

It is common to see certain people as wholly unique, that there is something special about them. We look at great innovators like Elon Musk, and think he is special because not many people think they have what it takes to revolutionize travel on land an in space. Even figures like Arnold Schwarzenegger we regard as special, after all, we think, it must take a special person to become the strongest man in the world, a movie star, and a state governor.

Most people imagine them as black swans, who stick out from the others and their individuality is worthy of praise. But very few swans are black, yet does this mean that ordinary swans (or ordinary people) are without value? Clearly not. Each are unique.
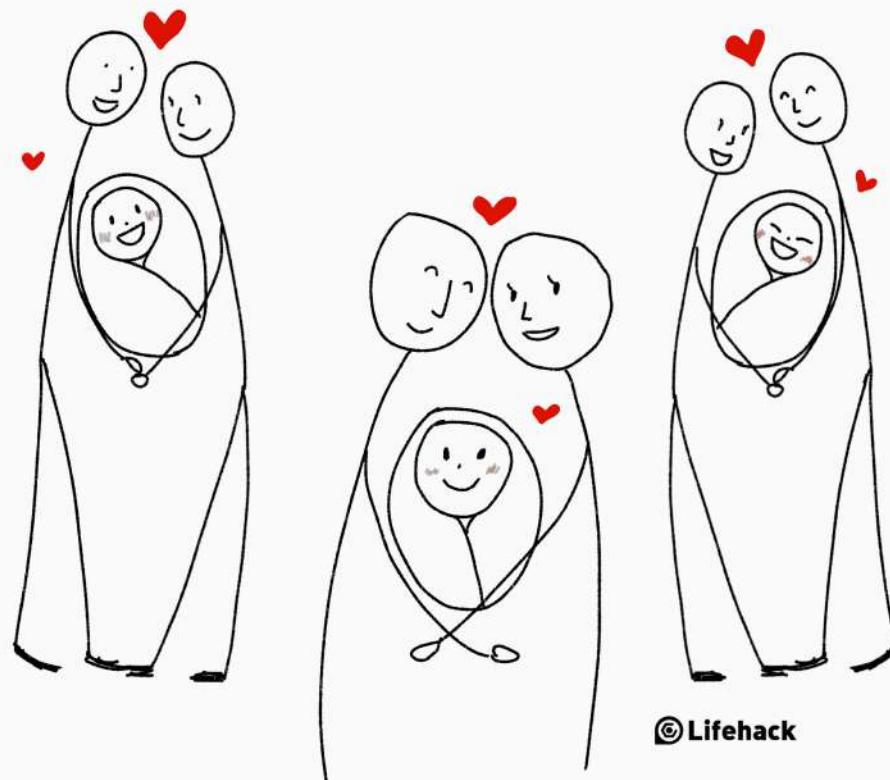
But this raises an interesting point. If each of us are unique and special, then that must mean that none of us are. If the norm is special, then being special is meaningless.

If this is the case, then where does our obsession about being special come from?
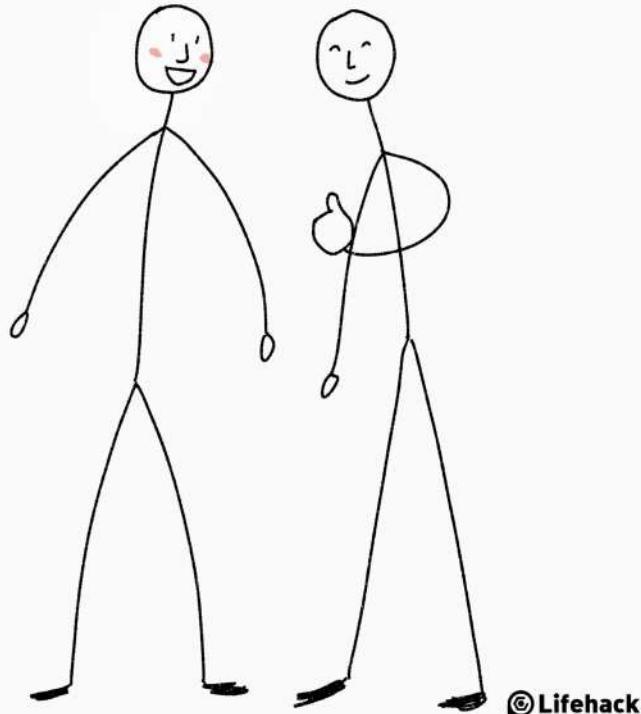
By Default, Everyone Thinks They're Special

We are hard wired to feel special, or otherwise want to feel special. On top of this, our parents tend to see us as special from birth (after all we are *their* children and are special in that sense). This makes us either want to be special to justify their views, or grow up thinking we are naturally unique and special.

From childhood we see those who are seen as smarter, more attractive, or charming succeed where most of us don't. Deep down we all want recognition, its simple human nature. So when we see others getting it, we either get jealous, or think them uniquely special.

When we get recognition, our confidence and self esteem grows, this can be extremely good for you, but can also have the affect of having an overly inflated sense of worth and pride, and thus think ourselves special to everyone else.
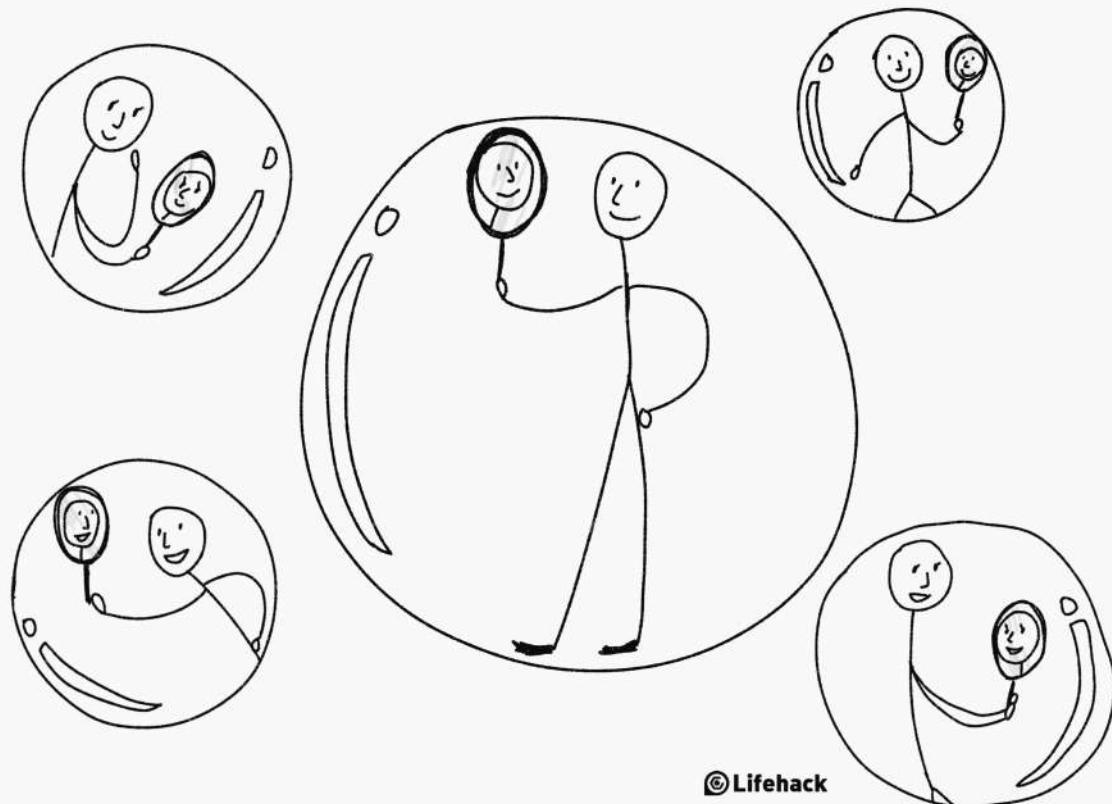
Feeling "Special" Is Dangerous

No matter how much we want ourselves to be the special ones, most of us are just ordinary. Some people are simply better than others at things.

This might seem as an insult for some, but think about it, it is impossible to be great at everything. Though some people might be better than you at one thing, you might be better than them at something else.

Sure, we can look at people like Schwarzenegger or Elon Musk as if they are special. But there are things that you can do that they would struggle with. The issue is, we only see the things that they are great at. I might, for example, cook better than Elon Musk, or write better than Arnold Schwarzenegger.

This view of only seeing the positives and great attributes can apply to our view of ourselves too. Someone who is extremely prideful and sees themselves as incredibly special, will naturally have a limited view of themselves. They will be blind to their problems and flaws and negative sides.
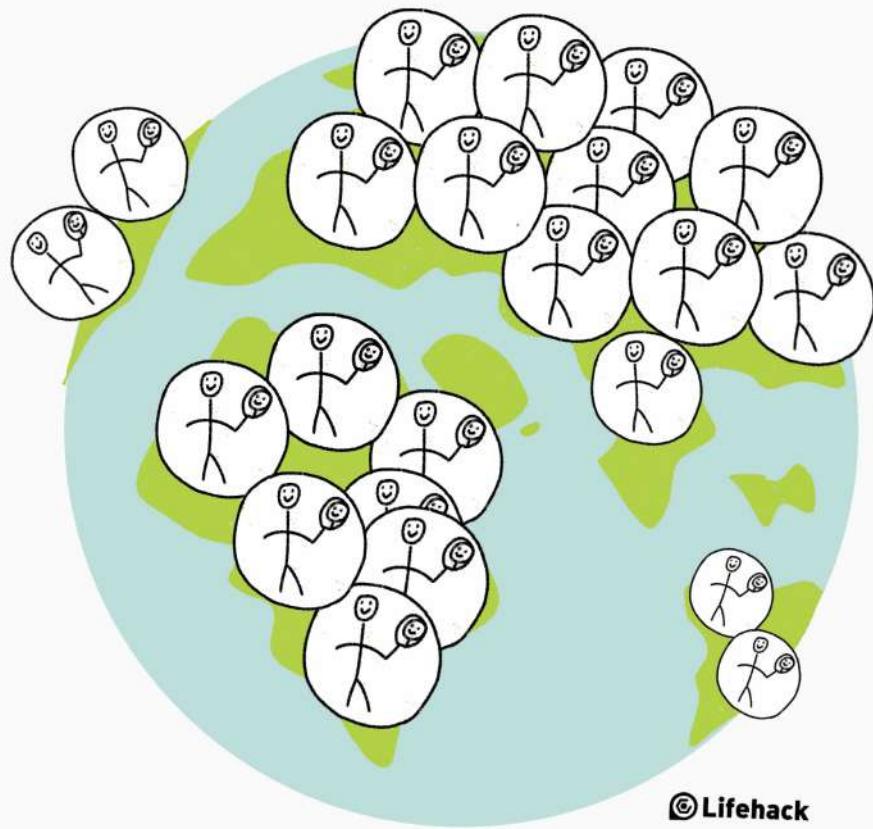
This is a major problem in itself, without knowledge of your flaws, after all, it is impossible to improve yourself. The person who sees themselves as special would in fact be in a worse place than most people in the world, people who want to improve themselves.

Redefining "Special"

There are roughly 7.442 billion people in the world right now, and that number is increasing rapidly. Therefore the possibility than any one of us is more gifted than anyone else is borderline statistically impossible. Things I've experienced have been experienced by many thousands before me, and many thousands will experience the same after me, it is inevitable.

So with this, perhaps the only way to be special is to feel good about ourselves. If nobody is truly special, then why need to focus on those seen as greater?
If nobody is born special then there is nothing stopping you achieving as they have.

This idea may be disheartening at first, but I think there is something liberating about it. There is no longer any pressure to feel like you have to be special and great at everything.

Everyone is unique in the sense that there is nobody in world who is them. There never has been before, and never will be ever again. So instead of trying to be better than everyone else and unique, what's left is to be great in your own way. You might love to draw and are great at it (I'm certainly not!) so why not just celebrate your drawing skills. Maybe you won't end up being the next Michaelangelo, but why should that stop you?

The Beauty of Pain

No one wants to suffer. As a general rule, people like to avoid hurt and pain as much as possible. As a species, humans want a painless existence so much that scientists make a living trying to create it.

People can now choose "pain-free" labor for babies, and remedies to cure back pain, headaches, body-pains and even mental pains are a dime a dozen. Beyond medicine, we also work hard to experience little pain even when it comes to loss; often times we believe a breakup won't hurt as much if we are the ones to call it off.

But would a world without pain truly be painless? It's unlikely. In fact, it would probably be painful exactly for that reason.

If people never experienced hurt, they wouldn't know what it was. On the surface level, that seems like a blessing, but think for a moment: if we didn't know pain, how would we know peace? If you don't know you've hurt or been hurt, how would you know that you need to heal? Imagine someone only knowing they have an incurable cancer at the final stage because no obvious symptoms have appeared at early stages.

Without the feeling of pain, people won't be aware of dangerous situations—what should or shouldn't do for survival.

Pain Is Our Guardian

Pain serves to protect human beings from harmful actions. It's the same reason parents teach babies that fire equals hot, and that hot equals hurt. Should the baby still place its hand in a fire or on a stove, the intense pain remains so memorable, that the child is certain never to repeat that action.

In the same way, pain within human bodies can serve as a warning that something is not right. Because you know what it is to feel "well," you know what it is to feel poorly. ((University of Calgary: Why is Pain Important?))

Along with serving as a teacher of what not to do, pain also teaches you what you are made of in terms of what you can handle as an individual.

While the cliche, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger" is a tired term, it's used excessively for a reason: it's true. Pain helps you learn to cope with life's inevitable difficulties and sadnesses— to develop the grit it takes to push past hardships and carry on.

Whether it's a shattering pain, like the loss of a loved one or a debilitating accident, pain affects everyone differently. But it still affects everyone. Take a breakup as an example, anyone who has experienced it knows it can hurt to the point of feeling physical. Especially the first breakup. At a young age, it feels like the loss of the only love you'll ever know. As you grow and learn, you realize you're more resilient with every ended relationship.

No Pain, No Happiness

You only know happiness when you have known pain. While the idea of constant happiness sounds nice, there is little chance it would be. Without the comparison to happiness, there's no reason to be grateful for it. That is to say, without ever knowing sadness or pain, you would have no reason to be grateful for happiness.

In reality, there is always something missing, or something unpleasant, but it is only through those realizations that you know to be grateful when you feel you have it all. Read more about why happiness and pain have to exist together: *Chasing Happiness Won't Make You Happy*

In a somewhat counter-intuitive finding, researchers found one of the things that brings about the most happiness is challenge. When people are tested, they experience a greater sense of accomplishment and happiness when they are successful. It is largely for this reason that low-income individuals can often feel happier than those who have a sense of wealth.((Greater Good Magazine: The Importance of Pain))

This is a great thing to remember the next time you feel you would be happier if you just had a little more cash.

Avoiding Pain Leads to More Suffering

Pain is inevitable, embrace it positively. Anyone who strives to have a painless life is striving for perfectionism; and perfectionism guarantees sadness because nothing will ever be perfect.

This isn't a bleak outlook, but rather a truthful one. The messy moments in life tend to create the best memories and gratitude. Pain often serves as a reminder of lessons learned, much like physical scars on the body.

Pain will always be painful, but it's the hurt feelings that help wiser decisions be made.

Allow Room for the Inevitable

Learning how to tolerate pain, especially the emotional kind, is a valuable lesson.

Accepting and feeling pain makes you human. There is no weakness in that. Weakness only comes when you try to blame your own pain on someone else, expecting the blame to alleviate your hurting. There's a saying,

> "Holding on to anger is like drinking poison and expecting your enemy to die."

Think back to the last time you were really angry with someone. Maybe you were hurt because you got laid off from a job. You felt angry and that anger caused so much pain that you could feel it in a physical way. Being angry and blaming your ex boss for that pain didn't affect him or her in any way; you're the only one who lost sleep over it.

The healthier thing to do in a situation like that is acknowledge your pain and the anger along with it. Accept it and explore it in an introspective way. How can you learn and grow? What is at the root of that pain? Are you truly hurting and angry about being laid off, or is the pain more a correlation to you feeling like you failed?

While uncomfortable, exploring your pain is a way to raise your self-awareness. By understanding more about yourself, you know how to deal with similar situations in the future. You can never expect to be numb to difficult situations, but you will learn to better prepare financially for the loss of a job and be grateful for an income since you now know nothing is promised (no matter how much you work or how deserving you may feel).

Pain Hurts, but Numbness Would Be Worse

Pain does not feel good, but the bad feeling of it will help you learn and grow. It makes the sweet moments in life even sweeter and the gratitude more sincere.

To have a happier and more successful life, you don't learn from success or accomplishment, but through pain and failures. For it is in those moments that you learn how to do better in the future or at least cope a little more easily.

You are the strong person you are today because of the hardships this life has presented to you. While you may have felt out of control when those hard times came, the one thing you will always have control over is how you choose to react to things. The next time you hurt or you're angry or sad, acknowledge it and allow yourself to ruminate in it. Then take a deep breath and start learning from that pain. You've got this!

Real Alone Time Makes You Smarter

Lots of research has pointed at the notion that people who socialize more tend to be much happier. But this doesn't apply to everyone. One factor where socializing more doesn't equal more happiness is intelligence. People who are highly intelligent become less happy the more they socialize because it's thought smart people adapt more easily to the modern world. In other words, they understand that our primal need to keep close contact with a social group for food and shelter is no longer applicable in modern society.

In fact, the more intelligent someone is, the more they tend to focus on long term goals instead of short-term gratification. Socialising, therefore, doesn't hold as much value as working towards their goals.

You're Not Alone in Embracing Your Alone Time

If you're reading this thinking how much you love your alone time and proud that you carve out time for yourself on a regular basis, you're one of many. One survey found 85% of adults believe alone time is important to them ((Pew Research Center: Americans' Views About Data Collection and Security)).

While the increasingly popular concept of mindfulness encourages us to connect with ourselves, the importance of alone time is becoming a necessary part of our lives. But do you we really use this time to our advantage? Do we really spend this valuable alone time "alone"?

How We're Spending Alone Time in the Wrong Way

Being physically alone in a room is one thing, but if you don't utilise this time in a way that you're free from social stimulation, you're not getting the true benefits.

With modern times comes digital distractions. Having time by yourself means you can enjoy doing the things that relax you but these days that can mean idly jumping on your phone or computer. Replying to texts and messages and browsing Facebook is providing the danger of becoming less relaxed and satisfied with the benefits that alone time can create in your life.

Our idea of alone time needs to be defined as distancing ourselves physically and digitally from the world. In fact, when we're mindlessly browsing social media or watching television, our brain is actually shifting into a state where it starts to crave social interaction with others ((Forbes: When You Think Your Brain Is Doing Nothing, It's Really Getting You Ready To Socialize)). This obviously counteracts the very reasons why you need alone time in the first place.

Why FOMO is the Death of Your Alone Time

FOMO or the Fear of Missing Out is a phenomenon all social media users have experienced at one time or another.

It's that needy, anxious feeling you get when you haven't checked Facebook or Twitter - that fear that there's stuff out there that you're missing out on and leads you to check just one more time to see what's new.

But what we're essentially checking are things that don't matter or add value to our lives. It may evoke that sense of security that we're up to date on what's going on, to be able to talk about the latest goings on with our peers but it's creating a greater insecurity in the long run.

Social media has the ability to have a huge negative effect on us. It creates a sense of competitiveness and comparison that affects the mentality we have of ourselves. It takes away those precious moments where we could be doing more productive tasks that actually go towards our personal growth and well-being.

How To Lessen Distractions

The key to this is lessening time spent on social media or watching TV rather than cutting it out altogether and there are ways to help you do this.

One is an online app called StayFocusd for Chrome users. Select the websites that you consider your biggest time wasters and set a time limit. Once this time has run out, Chrome will block you from using it giving you no choice but to focus on better things.

Another app is Forest where your seed will gradually grow into a tree. The idea here is if you move away from the app, your tree is in danger of withering away - encouraging you to stop the habit of using your usual distracting apps.

Practical Activities To Get More Out of Your Alone Time

The time you spend alone is a great opportunity to increase your well-being and promote positivity within yourself. Whether you have 15 minutes or several hours, there are certain activities that can help cultivate personal growth.

Self-Reflection: ask yourself a lot of questions

Self-reflection is something we tend to overlook. By not going through the process of deliberately self-reflecting on our thoughts and actions, we risk missing the opportunity to find growth and likely end up stuck in the same patterns.

- Review regularly how you spend your day, week or month
- Ask yourself what could you do differently to create challenges or create more happiness
- How can you change your current perspectives?
- Ask yourself: *am I living my best life?* If not, what small or big changes could I consider making?

Questioning yourself can sometimes feel uncomfortable but it's this resistance that is showing you there are answers you may need to face in order to create a better life or grow positively as a person.

Journalling: free your mind

There's a lot of power in writing things down and can be extremely therapeutic for the mind. When something is troubling you, writing it down can help clear it out and relax your mind. To do this, first write down your worries and feelings and then step back and contemplate them. Ask yourself if they're really valid and question why you're having these feelings.

The beauty of this process is finding time to intentionally stop and listen to your inner thoughts and feelings, taking time out in order to stop overlooking them and allowing them to grow bigger. **Always remember this rule: when it comes to unhappiness, the more you write it down, the less you'll remember it.**

Meditation: learn how not to think

While meditation is a wonderful tool for relaxing, it has many other benefits too. Research has found it has positive effects on our health including lowering blood pressure, increasing positive mental attitude, improving focus, memory and boosting creativity.

And you don't have to sit for hours on end to get these benefits. Just 5 minutes out of your day to sit quietly and focus on your breath will be enough to see an improvement and reap the rewards.

Watch Movies or Read Books That Change Your Perspective

Reading is a popular alone-time activity as is streaming your favourite movie. But consider reaching for a book or film that will change the way you view something.

Escapism is great every now and then, but in this busy world our time can be precious and using this time to change our mindsets and perspectives can be exponential for our growth and understanding.

The benefit of spending time alone is being able to make choices without others' influences. As humans, we tend to allow our egos to be persuaded by outside opinions instead of changing beliefs ourselves. By being solitary, we can help avoid this and discover our own ideas and challenge existing perspectives. A good way of doing this is through reading different books and watching movies that challenge our ideas about the world.

Our alone time can be extremely beneficial to us if we use it in the right way. Make the time for yourself as quality-focused and growth-oriented as possible. After a while you'll start to see and feel the positive effects.

Perfectionism Secretly Screws You Up

While perfectionism is commonly seen as believing you want to be perfect or perhaps the obsession of wanting something to be exactly right, being a perfectionist can manifest in other subtle ways:

- have to check something just one more time
- procrastinate with the thought that it isn't the perfect time to start something
- always the first person to spot a mistake

It actually reflects more than we think and can be a blessing or a curse.

"Perfectionism is more than pushing yourself to do your best to achieve a goal; it's a reflection of an inner self mired in anxiety" said Thomas S. Greenspon, a psychologist and author of a recent paper on an "antidote to perfectionism," published in Psychology in the Schools ((Psychology in the Schools: Is There An Antidote to Perfectionism?))

In other words, perfectionism is born out of uneasiness, concern and doubt rather than a simple basic want to do things well.

The Psychology Behind Perfectionism

Why are some people such perfectionists? There are several reasons why this personality trait is stronger in some than others and it's down to a certain psychological mindset.

While some people take or leave mistakes as a lesson, perfectionists see them as personal flaws. They mentally beat themselves up and feel that sense of failure - the same fear of failure that perfectionism stems from.

Another source of perfectionism is the issue of the ego. Many people want things to be perfect because they're in a mindset of caring what other people will think of them - that they'll be judged negatively if something isn't up to a certain standard.

Childhood experiences can also allow perfectionism to evolve in your personality especially if you've learnt from a parent or guardian that you somehow can't be loveable if you're not perfect. This transcends into your way of thinking throughout work and relationships into adulthood.

And of course, the restricted rules during your education years can teach you at a young age that following rules is important and to your detriment if you're to break them in any way or not live up to them.

How Perfectionism Secretly Screws You Up

Many people take comfort in being a perfectionist but it's a common myth that perfectionism creates perfection.

One downside is the time wasted on making something seemingly perfect and actually causes you to become less productive.

Spending more time on something can often be an illusion - we think we're improving something but that time isn't necessarily quality time and could be hindering your performance.

For example, say you were working on an important project for your department that accounted for 15% of sales for the company and it took you 4 months to complete. While another coworker completed another project in a month that only accounted for 7% of overall sales for the company. While it didn't rack up more sales, your coworker had time to complete further projects which brought a total of 21% of sales.

This is an example of the idea that failing fast is better than succeeding too slowly. When you fail fast, you learn much more in a shorter period of time preparing you for future success much sooner and this is what perfectionism can prevent.

How to Change Your Perfectionist Mindset

If you feel your perfectionism is holding you back, then it might be time to change your habits and way of thinking. There are several strategies you can adopt to change your perfectionist mindset and improve your success in life.

Abandon the "All or Nothing" Mindset

A common mindset when it comes to perfectionism is either you want to do something well or not at all. But the problem with this is in denying the importance of the process. Achieving greatness comes from the experience and insights gained from this process allowing you the chance to tune and apply these for future success. This inadvertently reduces the chance of failure overall despite what the perfectionist mind may try hard to deny.

Keep in Mind The 80/20 and 70% Rule

It's sometimes easy to ignore the essence of something when it comes to perfectionism but as long as the essence is apparent within whatever you're doing, it doesn't need 100% perfection. Just 70% is all it really needs for it to be great and the fine tuning can be done

afterwards. This way you're seeing the end result more clearly helping to see potential issues.

The 80/20 rule is a good one to keep in mind - only 20% of your efforts can amount to 80% of the results. Any more than this isn't going to make a huge difference plus it gives you that leeway to tune up the details at a later date.

Actively Ask For Positive Feedback

Feedback is every perfectionist's worst nightmare and while getting both positive and negative feedback is the ideal, this is something a perfectionist would struggle with already being aware of shortcomings and inadequacies. Therefore, asking for positive feedback on a regular basis can help counteract this and get the mind used to a balance of opinion.

Sort Out The "Must Haves" From the "Good To Haves"

Lots of ideas can be great unless perfectionism is your downfall. Prioritisation is key here but a perfectionist can find it hard to leave out ideas that they think should be included. However, this is detrimental to the quality of your work or project and can cause you to fall behind or add extra pressure on yourself.

Before you start any project, make sure you create a list of the 'must haves' and the 'good to haves'. Make the 'must haves' an absolute priority and only include the 'good to haves' if time allows.

Celebrate Small Wins Every Day

A perfectionist's mindset tends to lean towards the negative so writing down 3 daily achievements can help shift this mindset to one of positivity. Anything small from "I got up earlier than my alarm today" to "I met a new and interesting person" can get the mind thinking of positive aspects and detracts from the negative.

One study explains how this is all down to certain chemicals interacting with our reward system in the brain allowing us to receive the feeling of accomplishment. This feeling motivates us to repeat the process again in order to achieve it. Thinking of positive daily aspects, no matter how small, can literally train your brain to be more positive.

Set Realistic Goals

Setting unrealistic goals is a definite trait of a perfectionist and ends up causing feelings of inadequacy because they can be hard to achieve. Say you're an actor who's aim is to become a Hollywood star within a year or you want to have a successful published book

within the next 6 months before you haven't yet written a word - while this *could* happen, realistically you're bound to be disappointed.

Having goals is a wonderful thing but raising the bar too high can create feelings of demotivation and lack. So harvest that desire to improve yourself by all means, but not to the point of making yourself feel less-than.

Focus On The Big Picture

You can't always extinguish the perfectionist in you (that's perfectionism) but you can become a 'healthy perfectionist'. You can do this by always keeping the bigger picture in mind. Whenever you start drilling into an aspect or detail of your project, ask yourself how much it'll affect the end result. If it only contributes to around 2% then you need to let it go. This is an example of opportunity cost where there is potential loss of other avenues or alternatives because of sole focus on one idea.

Stepping back before diving in can save you a lot of time and frees you up to focus on a better result.

High Achievers Make the Most Mistakes

The impact mistakes have had on most people's lives is tremendous.

At school, you were taught to answer questions with model answers. At home, you were taught to be disciplined, have good manners and follow social etiquette. And at work, you've become accustomed to a constant expectation that you operate in a mistake-free manner!

The problem with all the above scenarios is that they punish mistakes. A teacher deducts marks for a wrong answer - a supervisor scolds people for failing to take the right action.

It's no surprise, then, that from a very young age, people have been made to feel bad about making mistakes. Some have even felt like a complete failure. This constant negative feedback leads to most people desperately trying to live their lives without making any mistakes. It can actually become a compulsion. It may even lead to them trying to hide or lie about their mistakes.

But there is more to making mistakes than most have been led to believe.

The Unexpected Positive Side of Being Wrong

The truth is, by forever seeking to avoid mistakes - we actually end up making more mistakes!

It's time to start looking at mistakes from a different perspective. They aren't the monster they've been made out to be. They've the remarkable ability to help bring about powerful and rapid personal growth.

If you try to avoid mistakes, then you'll also be missing opportunities to experience something different from what you planned or expected. Imagine that you miss a connecting flight while traveling to an exotic location. By missing the flight, you are forced to stay for 24 hours in a destination that you'd never been to before. To your surprise, though, you find that the nearest city to the airport is picturesque, cosmopolitan and friendly. In fact, during your time there - you begin to fall in love with everything the city has to offer. When you finally have to leave the city to go back to the airport, you feel genuinely sad. The city captivates your interest and warms your heart.

Clearly, if you hadn't missed your flight, you would've never visited the city - and never discovered your immediate liking for it.

Life can be like that. Mistakes can lead to adventures and opportunities. And beyond that, **mistakes can help you to understand how to make better decisions in future situations.**

Making Mistakes Does Not Fend off Success, Avoiding Them Does

Unsuccessful people put the bulk of their focus and energy on avoiding mistakes, whereas **successful people put the bulk of their focus and energy on making continual attempts at reaching their goals**.

Jim Carrey, on his debut comic stand-up at a club called Yuk Yuk's in Toronto, he was booed off stage. However, he didn't let this break him. Instead, he used the experience as a wake up call to improve his performance. This wasn't the only set back he endured. When auditioning for the Saturday Night Live 1980-81 season, he failed to land the part. ((Wanderlust Worker: 12 Famous People Who Failed Before Succeeding)) Again, he didn't let this destroy his confidence or ambition, but instead he kept on pursing his dreams until he finally broke through to the mainstream in 1994 with the blockbuster movie "Ace Ventura: Pet Detective."
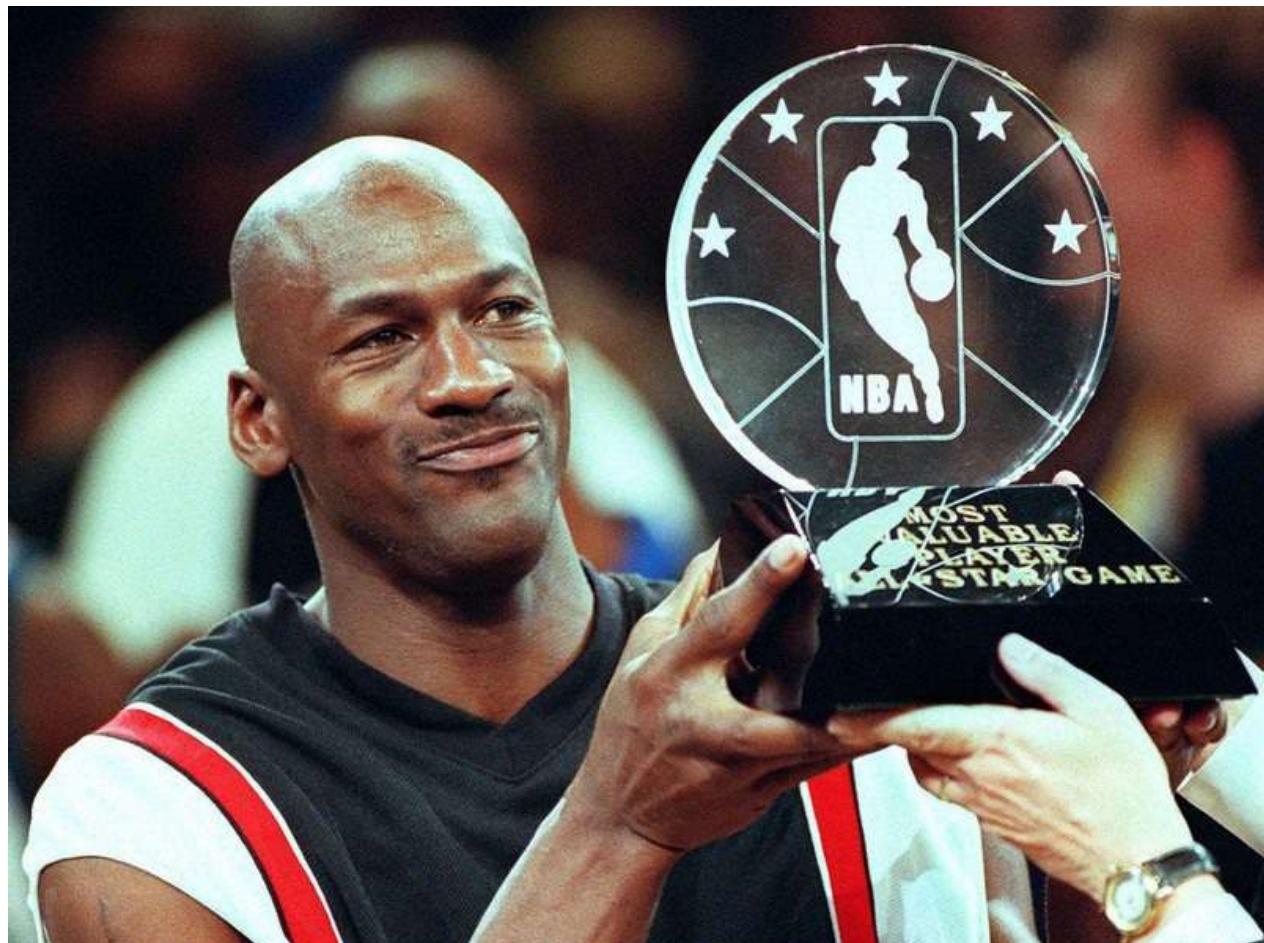
▲ *Jim Carrey wasn't so successful as a comic stand up at the very beginning.*

And then there is Michael Jordan. His profile on NBA's website describes him as "the greatest basketball player of all time."((NBA: Michael Jordan)) And this is how most people think of him. However, Jordan himself said that:

> "I have missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I have lost almost 300 games. On 26 occasions I have been entrusted to take the game winning shot, and I missed. I have failed over and over and over again in my life."

But he clarified this statement by adding some vital information: "*And that is why I succeed.*"

Each attempt they made was open to mistakes. **With more attempts made, the more feedback they received, and the more chances they gained to do better.**

So, if you really want to avoid mistakes - attempt nothing and take no risks. Your record may remain clean, you'll make few mistakes, but you'll also have few achievements to write home about. In other words, **avoiding mistakes is the easiest way to become and stay unsuccessful.**

From Making Mistakes to Mastering Mistakes

Failed attempts are only futile if you don't learn from them.

Let's say that you expect that mistakes will happen after you've made a choice. This is natural. You're aware that choices come with risks, and risks can lead to mistakes. However, if you allow the same mistakes to occur time and time again, then you're not learning or

evolving - but instead are stuck in a rut. Albert Einstein said it well:

> "The definition of insanity is repeating the same mistakes over and over again and expecting different results."

A much better approach, is to analyze your mistakes, and to see if you can work out how to avoid them in the future. Put another way, **make every attempt count and learn from it**. By doing this, you'll quickly overcome foolish mistakes, and begin to make real progress in your life.

As a hard-hitting example for you to think about, if you know that drunk driving can kill, and you still do it because you think it's about "making more attempts and mistakes," that's a foolish act - not an attempt that will help you grow.

On the other hand, if you plan a business project with some risky ideas, but expect there will be mistakes, then even if these efforts turn out to be unsuccessful, you'll learn from them.
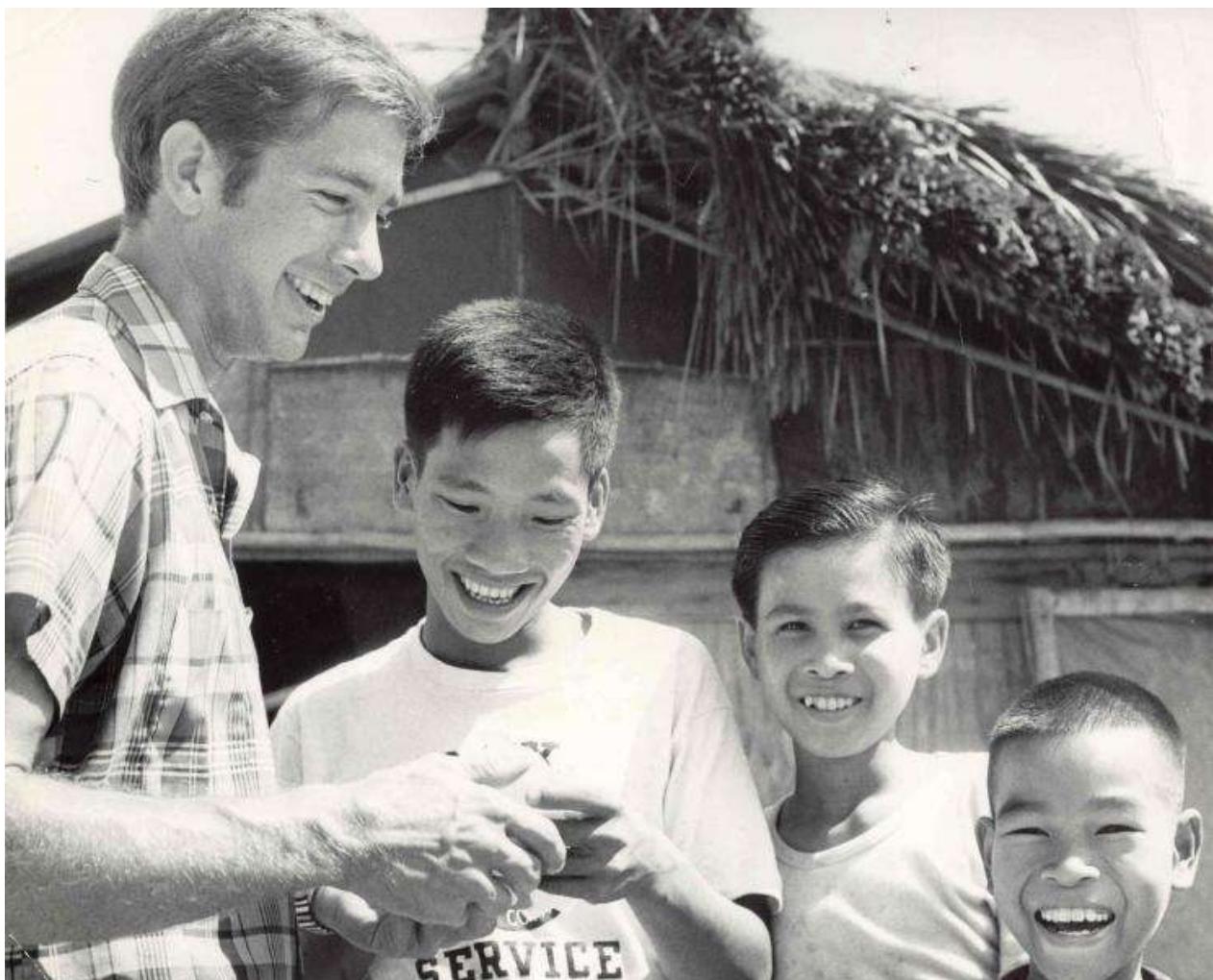
A mistake is just a *mis-take*,start over by learning from your last *mis-take*.

Making mistakes doesn't equal failure. Not making any, however, will mean that you miss out on tons of attempts and learning opportunities. This guarantees failure.

Be brave, be bold, and be prepared to make mistakes.

The Conscientious Mind Is a Successful Mind

Douglas Hostetter was a conscientious objector to war who found himself faced with the dilemma of having to fulfill his military obligation during the Vietnam War in 1966. As a conscientious objector to war, Douglas refused to carry or use a weapon or participate in any of the violence of war. Instead, he opted to serve by teaching English to Vietnamese children. He also opted to live outside the heavily guarded walls of the American camps. He lived in a bungalow completely exposed to enemy forces. He had no gate, walls or weapons to defend himself. He insisted on fulfilling his service in a non-violent manner and was able to dedicate himself to providing quality education to surrounding Vietnamese villages on his terms.((Civilian Public Service.org: Doug Hostetter))

Being tagged a conscientious person, on the surface, seems to like it would be a pretty good way to be classified. But the truth is that those who truly commit to living a life of conscientiousness subject themselves to a lifetime of sacrifice and to the possibilities of

being ostracized and misunderstood.

A Conscientious Life Is a Fulfilled Life—but Not Necessarily a Happy One

Many personality psychologists believe that there are five basic dimensions that comprise a person's personality. Experts call them the "Big 5".((Very Well: The Big 5 Personality Traits)) These are a set of five broad personality traits and include: extraversion, agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism.

Conscientiousness as defined by Psychology Today is:((Psychology Today: Conscientiousness))

> "...a fundamental personality trait that influences whether people set and keep long-range goals, deliberate over choices or behave impulsively, and take seriously obligations to others."

Conscientiousness is the character trait of **being deliberate, careful, meticulous and vigilant**. The presence of conscientiousness is the fundamental personality trait and determinant that influences people to set and systematically chase goals. It is what makes people keep their word, fulfill their obligations and remain steadfast and loyal in the face of opposition.

In other words, it is the ability to live intentionally.

The Conscientious Mind Is a Strong Mind

How do you know if you are conscientious or not? A person with low levels of conscientiousness can be described as easily distracted, unfocused, unmotivated, spontaneous and is often called "flighty" and "all over the place." If you find yourself constantly failing to achieve your personal goals or quitting projects midway through—you may need to work to live a more conscientious fashion.

The absence of conscientiousness is a key contributor to the absence of success. Becoming more conscientious requires an organized and industrious mind.

Organization and living an orderly life is a predictor in whether or not you achieve what it is you want in life. Having things neat, tidy and well organized keeps your mind neat, tidy, organized and focused. Establishing routines and sticking to them as much as possible is a great way to bring order to your life.

When working to become more organized, be careful not to over do it. Placing routine and order as a top priority leads to perfectionism, anxiety and other counterproductive attitudes. Put yourself on a schedule and get organized—but don't go overboard.

Industriousness is associated with tenacity and grit. It is **the passion and perseverance needed to achieve long-term goals**. Industrious people are often described as achievement/goal-oriented, disciplined, efficient, purposeful, and competent. They are productive, not busy. They chase their goals and live life intentionally and methodically work hard to achieve their destiny.

Equipping with the Conscientious Mind

Conscientious people have several common habits that are worth studying. Here are five lessons we can learn from the masters of conscientiousness:

1. Think Deeper Before You Act

The conscientious mind always evaluates the pros and cons of a situation and considers the consequences of their actions. They exercise impulse control and work to act versus merely reacting. They count the cost before they undertake an endeavor and give their word.

Before launching a business, a conscientious person will do extensive amounts of research and ensure they have the appropriate capital and resources in place before they dive in and begin. They understand the market space, their brand, their customers and know the type of people they need to hire in order to be successful. Their business succeeds and thrives because of preparation, planning and diligence; not luck.

2. Commit to Promises

Because the conscientious think before they act, they are able to commit to things they know they can deliver. They provide exactly what they promise. They consider the cost before they make a promise and then dogmatically work to do what they say they are going to do.

If you promise your best friend you are going to help them move on a specific weekend, that is precisely what you should do. But before you commit to helping your friend, you should first ensure that you are available for the date and duration of time they need you. You should add it to your calendar and consider that date, time and task non-negotiable. You should show up when you said you would, work hard and fully deliver on that promise.

3. Don't Rely on Mental Notes

Taking mental notes is great and we all do it. But there is one major problem with using your mental notes to recall information—you won't remember it. Conscientious people write things down. They add dates to their calendar. They are schedulers and note takers. They intentionally make jotting notes a part of their routine and standard operating procedure. Read more about why *Human Brains Aren't Designed To Remember Things*.

4. Take Breaks and Carry On

Take rest, regroup and restart. But don't ever quit. Quitting is not an option. Remember, in order to be successful you need drive, determination and a stubborn will. You have to have fight, grit and a scrappy attitude to be who you truly can be.

If you have watched *The Hacksaw Ridge*, you would have heard of Desmond T. Doss. He epitomizes the type of fight, tenacity and strength of will the truly conscientious have. Desmond was a combat medic serving in WWII and his heroic actions, driven by his value system, led him to perform acts of heroism during the Battle of Okinawa. He became the first ever conscientious objector in US history to win the medal of honor. And he did it without ever firing a shot.

5. Take Responsibility for Problems

A conscientious person is not a coward nor a victim. They take responsibility for their part in failures and don't run from problems. They stand flat-footed and stare issues in the eye. And then they devise a plan and attack. They are brave, tough and resourceful. They seek out solutions to their problems and refuse to "sweep things under the rug" and blame others.

Say if you have a report due at work and you realize it's going to be late because you don't have the necessary input from your colleagues. You apologize to your boss and give him a new time that the report will be due while taking full responsibility for not getting the input on time. You work with your colleagues to expeditiously get the input you need, and do whatever you have to do to ensure that you deliver on your promise and meet the new deadline.

A Conscientious Life Is Not Easy, but Is Worth It

Conscientiousness is an act of one's will. It is intentional and requires purposeful actions, an organized mind and an industrious attitude.

By internalizing and embracing the five key habits of conscientious people, you set yourself up to be a reliable, productive and wildly successful best version of yourself.

People Who Succeed At School Don't Always Succeed In Life

When we were small, we were taught that if we wanted to be successful, we had to study hard and get good results at school. Getting straight "A"s had to be our goal if we wanted to succeed in life. But in reality, how many straight A students do you know become really successful as they grow up? The good boys and good girls who were very disciplined at school, submitting all their assignments on time and getting good results in exams may just end up doing a job they don't like despite the fact that they can make money out of it. Why is it like that? Weren't we taught that to become successful, we're supposed to study hard and be good at school?

What you need for a good and successful life is not really learned at school.

I'm not discouraging anyone to give up studying; there're subjects such as languages, simple maths, music and physical education which are useful for us. What I'm trying to say is that the school curriculum is not perfect.There're a lot of things which are essential to life missing in the curriculum. And there're many bad habits schools inculcate:((The Book Of Life: Success at School vs. Success in Life))

> They want us to put up our hands and wait to be chosen. They want us to keep asking other people for permission.They teach us to deliver on, rather than change, expectations.They teach us to redeploy ideas rather than originate them.They teach us to expect that people in authority know – rather than letting us imagine that – in rather inspiring ways – no one is really on top of what's going on.They teach us to trust that they have our largest, best, life-long interests at heart; without letting on that they are merely interested in our achievements

Basically, to succeed at school, you need to be obedient, and whether you're good or not very much depends on the teachers' expectations. And instead of helping students to understand why they should do certain things, teachers (or the school system) simply force students to follow the rules, leaving students no room for originality and critical thinking.But life doesn't work like this in reality.To succeed in life, you need to think out of the box instead of doing what everyone else's doing. And there're many aspects to take care of aside from the school subjects, for example, what to do to be a happy person; how to maintain a healthy relationship; how to work smart; and what to do to lead a meaningful life etc.

Doing bad at school doesn't make you a failure (and it's supported by statistics).

While it's a fact that anyone who has at least a high school diploma has more opportunities because one needs to have some fundamental knowledge and skills; statistics show that people who failed at school didn't end up failing in life.You may have already known that Steve Jobs, Richard Branson, Oprah Winfrey and Jim Carey etc. didn't do too well at school or are school dropouts.((Sergeï VanBellinghen: What are some examples of people who failed classes in college but turned out to be successful?)) In fact, there're a lot more than just the "big names" who are successful in life without completing school.According to *Current Biography Yearbook (editions 1959-2005 & 2007)*, out of all the successful people, at least 768 of them are school dropouts and they're successful in different fields.((Angelfire: Current Biography Yearbook editions 1959–2005 & 2007, biographies, autobiographies, interviews, news stories.))

- **Billionaires:** 26
- **Nobel Prize Winners:** 10 (6 Literature, 2 Peace, 1 Physics, 1 Chemistry)
- **Oscar Winners:** 63
- **Oscar Nominees:** 105 (includes above)
- **Best-Selling Authors:** 56
- **Presidential Medal of Freedom recipients (U.S.'s highest civilian honor):** 25
- **Congressional Gold Medal recipients (U.S.):** 12
- **Knighthoods:** 28
- and the list goes on...

You can check out the complete list of successful people here. Now that you understand the difference between doing good at school and doing good in life, what can you do about this?

Life is a really long lesson, so long that you can't define a person's success by just one section of it.

If you've already finished school, keep learning because what you learned at school will never be enough to lead a great life.If you're still studying, whether you're good or bad at school, don't take your school results too seriously. Never blindly believe what you've been told about getting good grades is the only way to be successful, or that following rules is always for the best of you. But also don't break the rules unless you've learned and

understood the rationale behind. In short, just don't stop thinking.If you're a parent or a teacher, don't just focus on the grades the children get. Try to discover their potentials and unleash their talents, that's how they build confidence and eventually lead a successful life.

The Mystery of Work Life Balance

Kate is a hard-working manager working at a startup company. She toils at work but gets that nagging feeling that she's missing out on living her life. And then perversely, when she's not working, she tries to switch off 'work-mode' to enjoy her passions, friends, family... but eventually she finds that she just doesn't have the energy.

Many people are like Kate, misunderstanding the true meaning of work life balance. They try to keep 'work' and 'life' separate, but this brings undesirable results.

Where the Curse of Work Life Balance Begins

Those who are trying to maintain a work life balance only by dividing their time - by driving a sharp wedge between work-mode and life-mode - are inadvertently dividing themselves.

When people juxtapose 'work' and 'life', they unconsciously think in terms of 'work' versus 'life' – and are constantly forced to choose one at the expense of the other. In this framework, a gain on one side is always a loss on the other side.

And so people start to see 'work' as the times when they are not living their lives. **'Work' is seen as a necessary evil that they must suffer through until it's time to switch off.** But if you encode everything related to work as negativity and suffering, while your 'life' strains under the weight of unrealistic expectations of enjoyment, there really is no balance there at all.

Re-balancing work and life is possible by seeking out a new and enjoyable job to a certain extent. **But no job is perfect. There are always going to be tedious aspects to any job.** And before long you'll wind up on the same 'life' versus 'work' see-saw because you haven't changed the old framework.

The Only Way to Break the Curse

The true goal is to redistribute the positive (+) and negative (-) evenly across life.

Most people try to make it all positive off work to compensate the negativity at work like this:

Most People's Work Life Balance Looks Like This

Work | Life

If it's all negative at work and all positive when the work mode is switched off, the work performance will suffer – creating even more negativity. People will lean heavily on their off-mode life for happiness, but they can't truly achieve happiness because they are not facing the problems at work.

Conversely, there are those who do strive to put positivity into their work life. Their work life balance looks like this:

Some People's Work Life Balance Looks Like This
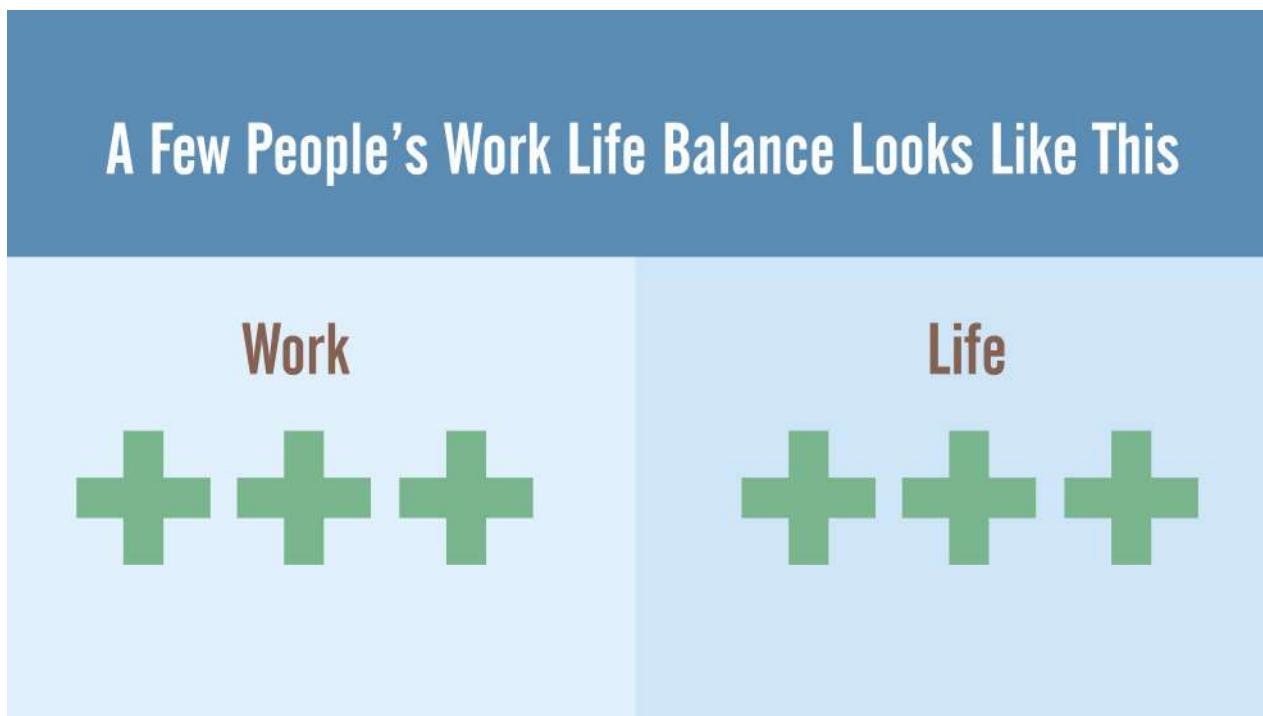
Work | Life

Unfortunately, if these people are still stuck in the old on/off framework, all the negativity will shift to their off-mode self, and their relationships and health will suffer.

Very few lucky people experience positivity on both sides of the equation, their work life balance looks like this:

If you are one of those who experience positivity in both sides, lucky you! You are one of the less than 5% of the population.

For the rest of the 95% of the population, here is a cure to having a realistic work life balance.

The solution is to recover the sense of a unified self. When you do, you'll dismantle the competing work/life binary, and you'll stop unconsciously labelling work as 'suffering' and life as 'enjoyment'. Positive energy will begin to flow smoothly and effortlessly through your life.

To recover the sense of a unified self, ask yourself: Why do I really do what I do, in life and in work?

Your answer to this question make up your blueprint of a unified self, charged with meaning that relates directly to who you are and what you care about.

Use your blueprint now to examine your life at work, your leisure time and your relationships and see if they align with each other. **The new framework is no longer 'balance', but 'alignment'.**

This will reveal to you a number of things:
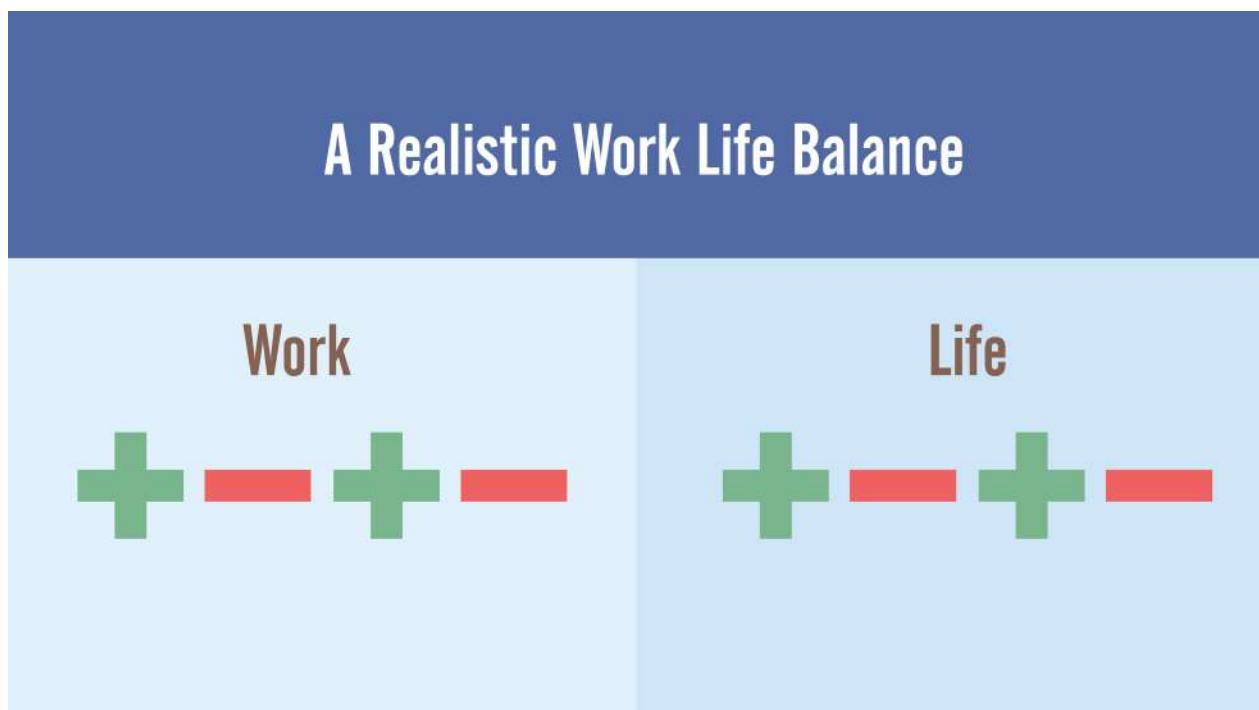
- **There are aspects of your work that are not suffering:** Look again and you'll find many positive aspects that reflect what you care about. For example, you may value creativity, and realize that you get the opportunity to show it at work every day.
- **Things you care about at 'work' are the same as what you care about in your 'life':**

For example, you may value friendship in your life, and you also practice this value with your colleagues. Your values exist in all your interactions, and serve your unified self.

- **What you do at work and what you do in your life support and enhance each other:** For example, the same generosity you show your friends can forge good client relationships when practiced at work. Your resourcefulness at work can be used to solve obstacles in your personal life.

Crucially, you never need to use the on/off work model again because you're constantly acting in accordance with what you truly value. As a result, you'll find that your positive energy will not be subject to draining or overflowing, off/on, but will instead flow consistently through all your states of being in a perpetual positive feedback loop.

This is how a realistic work life balance is like:

A Life Without the Distressing Curse

Your renewed conceptualisation from 'balance' to 'alignment' is an inner transformation that can empower you whatever your current circumstances are.

For example, it may reveal that you truly are suffering in your current job. But now you can unroll your blueprint to identify the cause of the negativity (i.e. what isn't aligning with what you value?) and either remind yourself why you're really doing what you're doing, or make a tweak... or indeed change your job.

Even if the latter, you can still be sustained by positivity until you find that new job. You may hate your everyday tasks, but one of things you value is to be a good provider for your family – so you're spurred on, knowing that you're doing that every day.

Or if you're a workaholic, your blueprint may reveal that what you previously undervalued as 'off-mode' (relaxing, having fun, pursuing a passion, spending time with family and friends) actually contain a wealth of values that support - and even enhance - a well-rounded working life.

A value-rich and optimally tuned work life alignment helps maintain a flow of positive energy and happiness in all aspects of being. So go ahead and make the blueprint of you.

Minimal Living Is the Secret to a Happy Life

There are a plethora of self-help books that will guide you towards leading a happier life. Maybe you've bought the majority of them and even applied a lot of what's been said. But do we really need all this advice? If there could be one habit we could adopt to be generally more happy it would make our path to happiness and wellbeing much easier.

So what is it? Well, it's the concept of 'less is more' or, in other words, taking a more minimalist approach to life.

What Minimalist Living Really Means

Minimalist living may conjure up images of a bare house or cutting down on the stuff we enjoy - in other words, we must sacrifice enjoyment to be happy. Our modern world offers us so much to choose from and surely living minimally means we're not taking the full advantage of what we can have, right?

It doesn't have to mean giving up on our favourite things or getting rid of all our home comforts. As a concept, what minimalist living really means is **recognising your worth more than the worth of material things.**

We can get very caught up in the things we *want* - those things that satisfy short-term - instead of focusing on what we *need*. Another way of looking at it is giving ourselves the sense of freedom - freedom from the external things and freedom from the need for possession.

This doesn't have to be a life-changing task but rather a shift in mindset and perspective towards what you consider is important to you.

How Living Minimally Will Benefit Your Life

There are so many benefits to creating a more minimalist life, not just for your physical living space but for your positivity of mind - **it's a process of decluttering** and decluttering can do wonders for our general wellbeing.

It allows us to **refocus on what's important,** creating more energy and time for ourselves. Buying and maintaining the stuff we have is a real money drainer so eliminating possessions also eliminates worry and stress, opening up a sense of breathing space.

But It Also Comes With Difficulties...

Many of us find this a hard concept to put into practice. As mentioned before, we live in a time when we're bombarded with a never-ending selection of stuff at our fingertips. Society makes it so there's a certain expectation - we can't live without a mobile phone, we should keep up with the latest fashions, we need to continually upgrade to make sure we're not falling behind.

All this can make it difficult to declutter our lives and take on a new way of approaching how we live. But once you start considering yourself, your self-worth and what's important to you rather than what's important to your society, it can be a truly freeing experience.

Put It Into Action: Ways To Go Minimalist

Becoming minimalist doesn't have to happen overnight. Making small shifts is a better way to sustain a long-term perspective on decluttering. Starting the process little by little will help you to feel a slow but sure difference in the way you approach life and ultimately make you feel lighter and happier.

1. Clear Out Your Wardrobe

The best way to start is with your clothes. How many of your clothes sit in the wardrobe or drawers only to be pulled out once or twice a year - or more than likely *never*? This process of throwing out items of clothing can be a very liberating experience. More often than not, they are taking up unnecessary space and you'll be surprised at how much you won't even notice they're gone once you've thrown them out.

Give yourself a challenge of getting rid of any clothes you haven't worn in the last 6 months. Watch as your stressful mornings of outfit dilemmas disappear.

2. Do The Food Challenge

Eating well is a must but our shopping bills can be way more expensive than they need to be. Enjoying minimalist living doesn't mean scrimping on good food and eating the same boring meals every day in the name of 'less is more'. Being savvy with the types of food we buy and finding interesting recipes that use cheap and tasty ingredients, can slash our shopping bill by more than we think. It's about training ourselves to shop smart and really be mindful of the choices we make.

3. Declutter Your Living Space

It's very tempting to buy decorations that will look good in our home but over time it can add up. Once we're used to stuff being around us we're almost blind to it. Take time to really look around and see what needs to go. Keep the things that are meaningful or really suit the scheme of your home and consider giving away things that don't have a place anymore. This can include furniture or the accumulation of kitchen utensils - remember duplicates are rarely necessary!

4. Travel Lightly

How often when travelling, do you pack way too much? We think of every possible scenario that could potentially happen that justifies taking much more than we need. Most of the time we don't use half the stuff we take. So if you're going for a week then pack for 3 or 4 days. Not only will you have less to carry, but you'll realise you can live with a smaller choice.

5. Declutter Your Mind From Social Media

It's normal these days to be glued to our phone and check social media several times a day but is it really necessary? How many times do you scroll through your Facebook feed and think *why am I looking at this again?!*

This approach to minimalism is purely for your mind. Give your brain a rest and make a conscious effort to not check social media. Don't beat yourself up when you do, but just note when you do it and question yourself. Over time you will notice you check it much less and you'll feel happier for it.

So, adopt the 'less is more' philosophy and see how decluttering your life will work wonders for your mind and perspective on what really makes you happy.

Section IV: Physical Strength and Time

A healthy body sets up for your day-to-day well-being and how well you will age. Maintaining fitness through good rest, balanced nutrition and exercise promotes efficient circulation, digestion and musculoskeletal strength. This allows you to live an active life and do more of what you want to do.
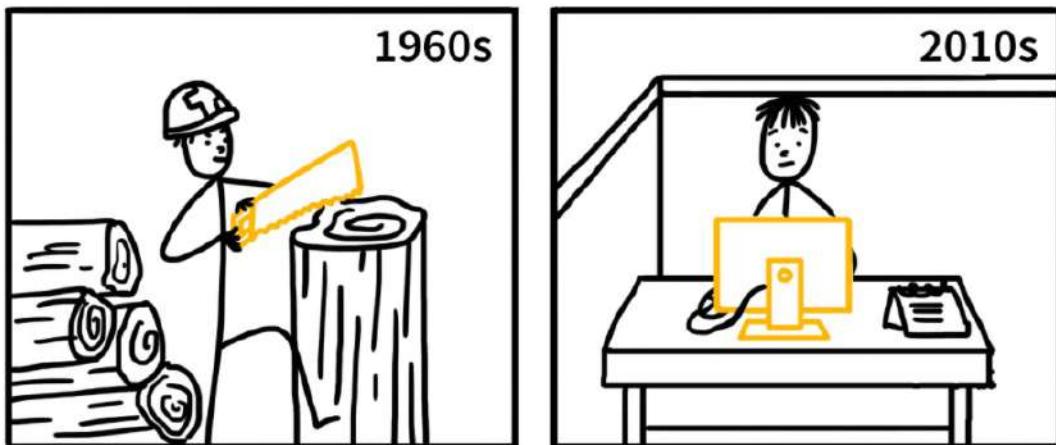
The Sitting Epidemic

What are you doing as you read this? Most likely, you're sitting down. On average, Americans are sitting for 13 hours a day and sleeping approximately 8 hours. This totals around 21 hours of sedentary habits a day.((CISION: New Survey: To Sit or Stand? Almost 70% of Full Time American Workers Hate Sitting, but They do it all Day Every Day))

When you get home from a long day at work or school, you most likely sit down to catch up on your favorite TV show or scope all the social media drama you may have missed. While it may feel like the right thing to do after a long, mentally tiring day, sitting actually increases your risk of death. Even if you hit the gym on occasion, you may not be compensating enough.((Forbes: Why Sitting Increases Your Risk of Dying Sooner))

Blame It on Our Work

Let's take a trip back through time. In 1960, an impressive 50% of U.S. jobs required heavy to moderate physical activity.((New York Times Health: Less Active at Work, Americans Have Packed on Pounds)) Presently, that percentage sits at a measly 20%, meaning the majority, 80% of jobs, are wholly sedentary or require very little physical movement. The vast majority of us spend our entire workday glued to our chairs and desks. For many of us, our fingers are getting the most exercise typing emails and messages.
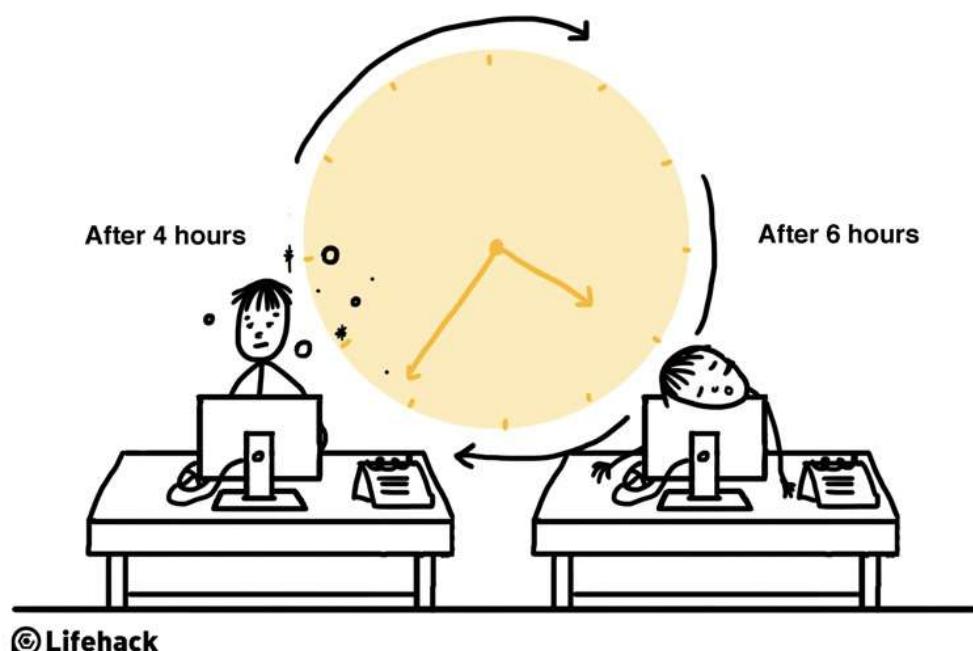
@Lifehack

The More You Sit, the Earlier You Die

Sitting more than six hours a day greatly increases your risk of an early death.

After two hours of sitting, your good cholesterol drops by 20%. While you may think going to the gym twice a week for an hour will make up for that, remember: we are sedentary about 21 hours a day. It doesn't take a mathematician to know that 2 does not equal 21 and will therefore not compensate for it.

Sitting also makes us fat. It decreases the activity of an enzyme called lipoprotein lipase (LPL) which helps burn fat.((HUFFPOST: How Sitting Too Much Is Making Us Sick and Fat — And What to Do About It))

After 4 hours

After 6 hours

©Lifehack

Stand, Stretch, Move

The key is to stand, stretch, and increase activity as much as possible. Some suggestions for you to move more even though you have to sit most of the time at work:

- Standing in place increases your energy more than sitting. Something as simple as walking increases your energy level by about 150%!
- Try to substitute taking the elevator with the stairs instead.
- If you talk on the phone daily or love lengthy group texts, stand up while you're engaged in these activities. Pace around your house, or chat on the phone while you walk through your neighborhood.
- Drink more water! So you will need to go to pee, and stand up to refill your water often.

- Set an hourly alarm to remind you to stand up and take a lap around the office or your house.
- And if you do have a busy office job, consider a standing desk. Here're some great options: 10 Best Standing Desks That Are High in Quality and Cheap in Price
- If you've been meaning to catch up with Karen down the hall at work, don't just hop on your email or instant chat; take a walk and talk to her in person.
- As added inspiration, use a health app to count your steps every day so you know how many steps you need to stay healthy and fit. Most fit people take about 5000 steps per day and sit less than 300 minutes. Start with that goal first.

Take care of your body and your lifespan and take a few extra steps every day! Remember to start small with substitutes for daily bad habits and try to stay aware of what you're doing at all times.

After about three weeks, you won't even have to think about it anymore; you'll be walking and moving more than ever! Your body will thank you for it. Share this article with a friend so you can keep each other accountable, too!

Poor Head Posture Makes Your Body Collapse

Our addiction to checking our smartphones, together with leading a sedentary lifestyle which includes sitting down at computers and desks for a majority of our day, can add to bad posture if we're not consciously thinking about how we sit or the angle of our head.

There are various negative effects brought on by our forward head posture such as major strain on our neck, backs and shoulders and causing misalignment through our spine and the muscles surrounding and supporting these areas.

Bad posture doesn't just affect the obvious areas in our body but our overall health suffers too - feelings of stress, mood, and even behaviour are all affected by the posture we choose to take each day.

Negative Effects Of Forward Head Posture

1. Causes misalignment of our spine

The most obvious negative effects of forward head posture is the tensions the occur in the muscles around the neck and spine. Each time we lean forward 60 degrees, we add an increase of 60 pounds of weight into our neck. You can see how adopting this position on a regular basis during the day can cause havoc and pain throughout the neck and back.

Our muscles then try to adapt to the position and cause tension, strain and misalignment in order to protect the spine.

2. Reduces Lung Capacity

Having the head in a forward posture can go on to cause even more health complications. According to Rene Cailliet MD, director of the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at the University of Southern California, having our heads down at an angle when texting, for example, can add up to 30 pounds of abnormal leverage on the cervical spine, pulling the entire spine out of alignment and losing up to 30% of vital lung capacity which obviously will affect the efficiency of oxygen getting to the cells in our body.

3. Increases Risk Of Depression

Poor posture also has been shown to affect depression in people, stress response, self-esteem, body image, as well as brain function and behaviour. A study in Brazil looked at posture in people with chronic depression. The researchers found that when people were going through bouts of depression, their forward head posture was more prominent.

4. Increases Risk Of Heart Disease
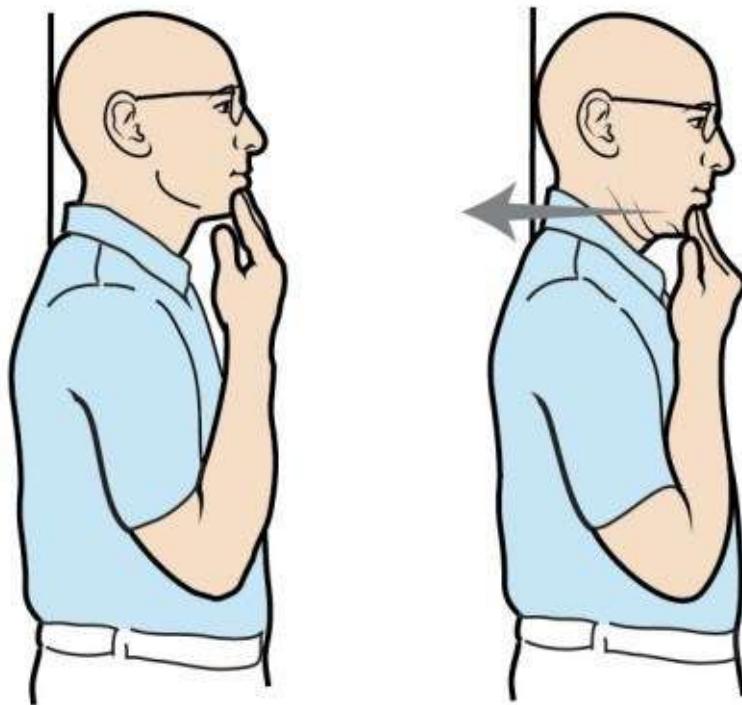
Saying your heart can be affected by your forward head posture seems far fetched but chiropractor Adam Meade explains that the curve of your cervical vertebrae are referred to as "the arc of life" by neurosurgeons because it's these small bones that create the main gateway for the spinal nerves that affect every organ in the body including the heart.

Want To Correct Your Head Posture? Try These Simple Exercises

Doing simple exercises throughout the day can help to realign your neck, spine and muscles in order to help the body function optimally and not be so affected by bad forward head posture.

Chin Tuck
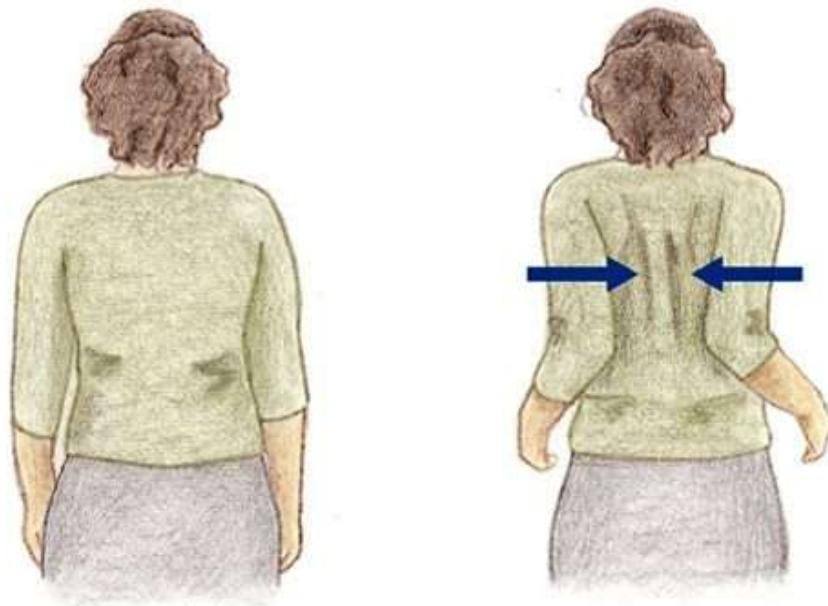
This exercise helps develop good postural habits if done throughout the day forcing the head and neck into a better position for realignment.

- Sit or stand up straight, looking straight ahead. Gently use one finger to push the chin in towards your neck and hold for a few seconds. Repeat this throughout out the day to force your neck to align with the spine.
- Gently draw your head and chin back like you're creating a double chin. You can use your fingers to push your chin back but make sure your head is facing forward and not tilting in any direction.
- Doing this gently, you should feel a stretch along the back of the neck.
- Release your chin and repeat.
- Do around 10 reps each hour.

Shoulder Blade Pinches

The slouching forward of our shoulders can create tension in our neck, upper and lower back as well as decreasing our lung capacity and compromising the health of our organs. This exercise is designed to realign the back and stretch out the shoulders and rest of the body.

via PFC Studio

- Sitting or standing with your back straight, draw your shoulder blades towards each other. You can interlock your hands behind your back for maximum stretch.
- Hold this for a few seconds, release and repeat.
- Try to perform 10 reps every hour throughout the day.
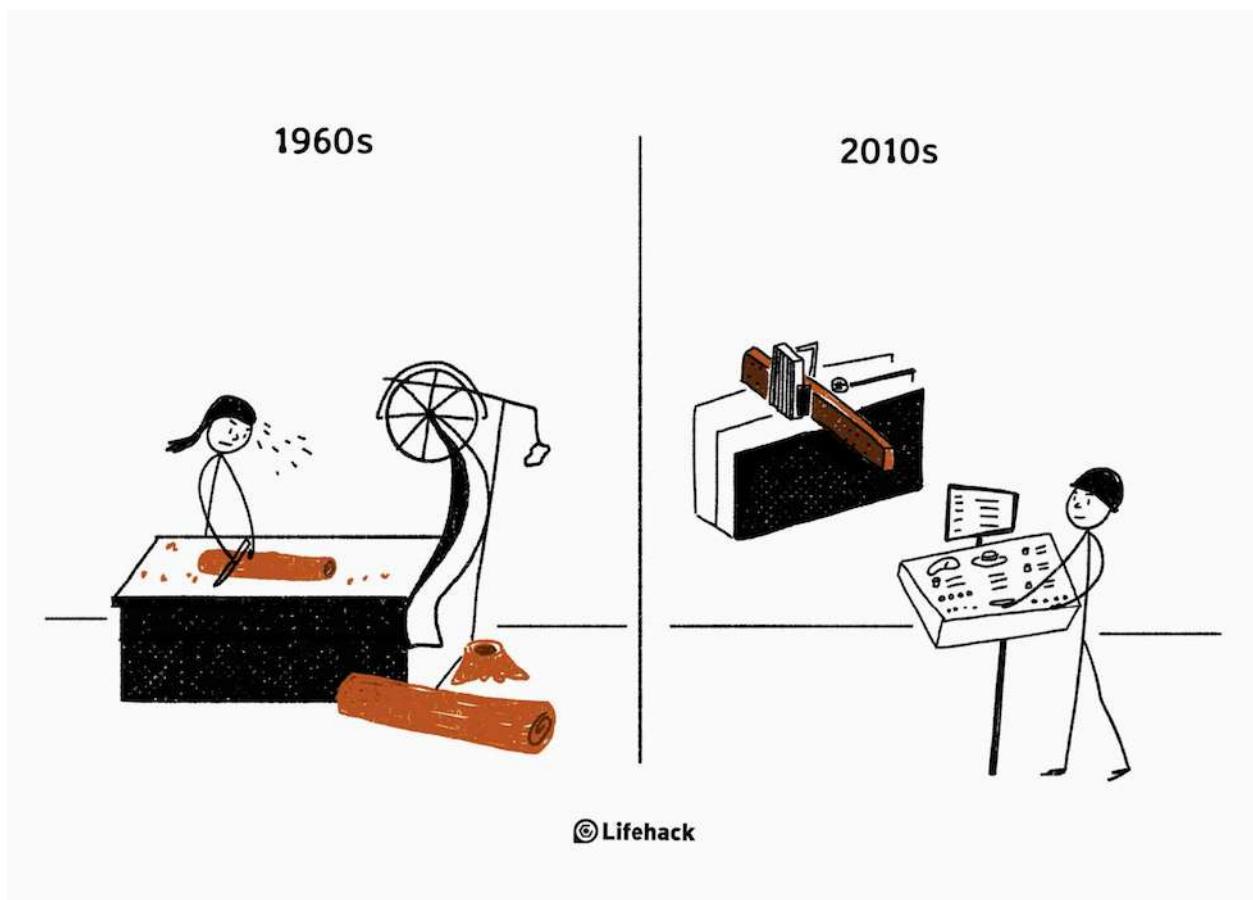
If You Exercise but Sit a Lot, You're Still Unhealthy

A typical day used to be spent doing physical labor, but that is no longer the case. The inactivity most of us experience as part of our daily career routine can increase our risk of dying. You may make time to go to the gym an hour or two a week, but if 40 other hours are spent sitting at a desk or sitting during your lunch break, you aren't actually compensating for it while you're at the gym.((Forbes: Why Sitting Increases Your Risk of Dying Sooner))
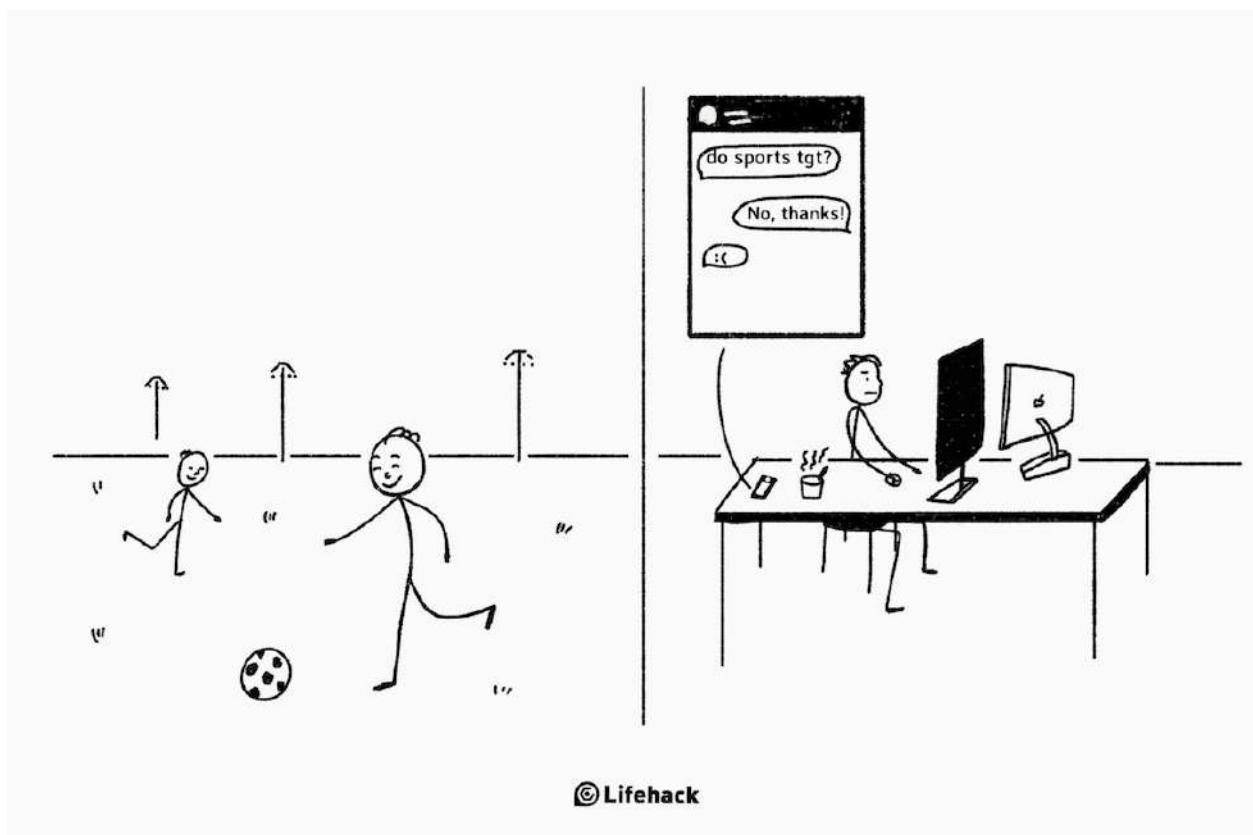
While many of us mean well and fully intend to walk more on our lunch breaks or go to the gym more frequently, we are often so mentally tired after a long day at work that we wind up laying on the couch at home watching tv instead.

Humans have grown to be less active

In the 1960's, approximately 50% of US jobs required heavy to moderate physical activity. This was a time when factory jobs were still common place and employees were on their feet all day whether doing heavy lifting or not.((New York Times: Less Active at Work, Americans Have Packed on Pounds)) Now, however, that percentage is a measly 20%, meaning a whopping 80% of American jobs are almost wholly sedentary or demand very little physical exertion. The unfortunate truth is that most of us spend our workdays glued to our chairs staring at a computer. Sitting, is now an epidemic.

Think back to your childhood. You used to run around playing outdoors. At school you had P.E. classes and may have even been encouraged by your friends to take up a sport. Unfortunately, as you grew up, your opportunities to participate in physical activity became less available. While working for an income is a huge priority, should it really come before our health? Unfortunately, it seems most of us have said yes and thus, have stopped moving very often.

Even though you may do exercises once in a while, exercise alone isn't enough to make you more active in general. In one study, two groups were analyzed. One group was very active, exercising more than 7 hours a week. The other group spent more of their time sitting down. The less physical group had a 50% greater risk of death. As if this isn't a scary enough result, the same group also doubled their odds of dying from heart disease.

Get up and get moving

The goal is simple: move more, sit less. Look for small ways to incorporate more activity into each and every day. Maybe tomorrow you could share this article with a coworker and make it a goal to walk every day on your lunch break together. Try to fit in two miles a day. And if you have stairs in your office, try to take those rather than opting for the elevator.

This video also has some great recommendations you can try!

For even more inspiration, check out this article for exercises you can do while you're at work: 29 Exercises You Can Do At (Or Near) Your Desk

Stand up now!

Don't get so carried away with big goals that you disappoint yourself right away; try to start small. When you find substitutions in your daily life (such as taking the stairs at work or even standing and pacing while you talk on the phone), you can quickly start some new habits you'll be able to keep in the long run.

While sometimes it can be so tempting to get home from a long day at work and lay around and binge watch your favorite series, you'll be happier, and much healthier, if you can make it a point to be active. If you're a pet owner, you'll also feel better about your relationship with your pup -- take them for a walk! Your healthy heart, and your furry friend, will thank you. If you don't have a pet, link up with a neighbor who would help you stay motivated and accountable.

Sleep Debt Can Never Be Settled

We've all been there: you've woken up promptly at 6 or 7 in the morning Monday through Friday, dragging and exhausted as you got ready for work. Then when Saturday rolls around, you wake up and check your phone to discover it's already noon.

While this is something we can relate to, it's not actually "normal." When you don't sleep enough during the week yet wake up early every day, you may try to compensate for that sleep-deprivation you feel by sleeping in on the weekend. However, you may have noticed that even when you sleep until late in the day on a weekend, you still feel like you aren't caught up in your rest. So you make the typical promises to yourself; you'll get to bed sooner tonight, you won't stay out so late next week, but those promises typically go unfulfilled and you typically go restless.

Sleeping can never be compensated

Sleep and your health isn't like the bank; you can't sleep off a debt you've accumulated during the week in an attempt to pay off the sleep debt. As you've probably noticed, no matter how hard you try, you can't gain back that lost energy over the week, no matter how late you try to sleep on the weekends.

Let's assume you were only able to catch six hours of shut eye Monday through Friday. You decide that if you can sleep an extra ten hours on the weekend, you'll be able to catch up and essentially start over. While it's a nice idea, it's not a realistic one. In fact, your reacting times and ability to focus will tend to be worse than if you had pulled an all-nighter.

If you slept poorly last night, or just not enough, you may have a chance to make up for it, but only if you make up for it tonight. If you try to catch on lost sleep over a long period of time, you won't succeed.((HuffPost: 6 Sleep Myths To Finally Put To Bed))

While some of you may have just read that and thought, 'hmm, that means I can go to bed late tonight to finish up my project and I'll just make up for it later,' don't be tempted. Sleeping late on the weekend to try to make up for the lost time will only result in further disrupting your sleeping pattern. You'll only feel worse.((Tuck: Myth of Catch-Up Sleep))

One such study, done by Northwestern University, has shown that when animals are sleep deprived - even partially - over consecutive days, they actually make no attempt to make up for that lost sleep.((Science Daily: Chronically Sleep Deprived? You Can't Make Up For Lost

Sleep)) This study is the first to prove repeated (although partial) sleep loss negatively affects an animal's ability to compensate for that lost rest. And as animals ourselves, we can learn from this fact.

Catching up a sleep debt later makes your brain suffer

No matter what you're doing late at night, sleep should be a priority. The more tired you are, the harder it is to accomplish even the smallest task. Even menial tasks like participating in a conversation with someone can seem particularly challenging because focus requires an intensity that you can only achieve through rest. The distraction you experience due to sleep loss is serious. Not to mention how dangerous that can make something like driving. ((Business Insider: 23 Incredible Benefits Of Getting More Sleep))

Lack of sleep also impacts short-term memory. Research has shown that sleep deprivation has a big impact on verbal learning and cognitive understanding. The findings show that, ((Nature: Altered brain response to verbal learning following sleep deprivation))

> "there are dynamic, compensatory changes in cerebral activation during verbal learning after sleep deprivation and implicate the PFC and parietal lobes in this compensation"

Essentially, we overcompensate in our sleepy state and hyper-focus on what someone is saying to us-but only in the moment. We quickly forget the information and that can lead to embarrassing forgotten events.

An extra hour of sleep a night for a rested feeling

Go to bed when you are tired; don't try to fight it. Set reminders to get you to sleep earlier. You may start with setting an alarm to remind you to sleep half an hour earlier at night, and then reset it to an hour earlier a week later. Gradually you'll get used to sleeping earlier.

If you have to be on your phone or computer before bed, dim the screen brightness to aid you in the transition to darkness.

If at all possible, allow your body to wake you up naturally in the morning (this means no alarms). As your body resets itself over time, you may feel a bit worse before you feel better, but be patient.((Scientific American: Can You Catch Up on Lost Sleep?))

> "As you erase sleep debt, your body will come to rest at a sleep pattern that is specifically right for you. Sleep researchers believe that genes—although the precise ones have yet to be discovered—determine our individual sleeping patterns. That more than likely means you can't train yourself to be a "short sleeper"—and you're fooling yourself if you think you've done it.

More than anything, make sure you **listen to your body**. If you feel you would sleep later than the alarm you have set in the morning, or like you need coffee in the morning to focus on anything, there's a good chance you aren't getting the amount of sleep you need. Don't get caught up in aiming for 7 hours, 8 or even 9 hours of sleep. Instead, focus on what your body is telling you and how you feel when you personally sleep for 6,7, 8, etc. hours.

Owe no sleep debt

Whether you're a student, a professional, or a stay-at-home parent, remember that one of your most important and essential jobs is to sleep. While there are so many articles out there telling you how many hours you should get based on gender and age, none of those articles know your body like you do; so listen to it.

Whenever possible, skip the morning alarm. Enjoy coffee if it's something you love, but if you realize you feel like you can't function without it, determine how you could have slept better or longer the night before.

You're Not Incapable, You're Just Burning Out

Living in this fast-paced society, we are vulnerable to burnout. Yet, if you can spot out the early symptoms of burnout, you can nip the bud and prevent a complete burnout, which otherwise is going to hinder your personal and also your professional life.

Have a look at the following list of early signs of burnout. If you have got some of these, very likely you are experiencing a burnout which you have not yet noticed!

Some obvious signs of a burnout

- **Difficult sleeping**: you have trouble falling asleep; or worse, you stay awake all night.
- **Loss of appetite**: you find yourself skipping meals as you do not feel hungry.
- **Negative feeling**: you occasionally feel hopelessness, sadness, guilt, or self-worthlessness.

Some lesser-known signs of a burnout

- **Repulsion of social situation:** you feel uneasy or even angry when someone is trying to talk to you.
- **Loss of enjoyment:** you feel not wanting to go to work or to school; you even no longer enjoy spending time with your friends and families, or doing the things you once liked to do.
- **Underperformance** : when failing to carry a project or to finish the task on time, people tend to think they are incapable. However, apart from low ability, it may be you are dragged behind by the burnout. The chronic stress is hindering you from being as productive as you were.

If you are having one or more of the above symptoms, you may be amid the middle of a burnout without your notice.

How burnout is defined from a medical perspective

A burnout is not just an emotional state, but it is actually a medical syndrome.

According to Dr. Ruotsalainen and his colleagues, a burnout is a type of psychological stress. It is characterised by exhaustion and lack of enthusiasm, and reduces efficacy within the workplace.((Ruotsalainen JH, Verbeek JH, Mariné A, Serra C: Preventing occupational stress in healthcare workers))

And according to the doctor of psychology, Sherrie B. Carter, a burnout can cause the following three problems:((Psychology today: The Tell Tale Signs of Burnout ... Do You Have Them?))

- Physical and emotional exhaustion
- Cynicism and detachment
- Feeling of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment

The causes of burnout

A burnout very often stems from one's job. However, besides the career, other aspects of life can also contribute to a burnout.

The following list tells all the possible causes of a burnout: ((HELPGUIDE.ORG: Burnout Prevention and Recovery))

Job-related causes of a burnout

- Doing unchallenging work
- Working under a high-pressure environment
- Facing demanding expectation

Lifestyle causes of a burnout

- Lacking supportive relationship
- Lacking sufficient sleep

Personality traits that cause a burnout

- Perfectionist
- Pessimistic about yourself and the world
- The need to gain control

Dr. Ruotsalainen and his colleagues summarize that a burnout is a consequence of one's inability to fully cope with a stressor; a burnout is not easily recognized, and will grow slowly, until it becomes severe.

To tackle burnout, try to identify the root cause of it first.

A burnout after all is the signals sent by your body to remind you that you need some rest. Before it is too late to prevent a burnout from getting serious, it is best to recognize the root cause of a burnout.

5 whys is a helpful tool at hand.

5 whys, developed by Sakichi Toyoda, is a an interrogative technique aiming to explore the cause-and-effect relation.

The primary goal of this technique is to keep asking the questions "why" until one reaches the heart of the problem. Each answer of the previous "why" provides the foundation of the next "why".

For example, you may start the practice when you recognise the burnout stems from your job.

Problem: My job causes the burnout

*First why: why my job causes the burnout?

because it is too stressful!

*Second why: why is my job stressful?

because the deadline of the project is due this Thursday.

*Third why: why do I find this project stressful?

because it is my first time to lead a project.

*Fourth why: why do I feel stressful for being the first time to lead a project?

because I want to impress my manager by nailing it, and I can't fail.

Fifth why: why do I want to impress my manager so eagerly?

because I hope to get a promotion so that I can earn more to support my next coming second new born.

Now, after a sequence of analytical interrogation, you finally reach the root that causes your burnout: the stress from your job is just a disguise; what you are really scared is the financial burden accompanied by your coming new born.

As illustrated here, 5 whys is a great tool encouraging you to avoid assumption and logical flaw before you reach the cause and effect of a problem. By finding the root cause of your burnout, it will become easier to tackle it.

Then, break down the big issue into smaller manageable actions.

To break down big problem into smaller ones is a mental technique called compartmentalisation.((Forbes: 5 Steps of Compartmentalization: The Secret Behind Successful Entrepreneurs)) It is widely applied by many successful entrepreneurs.

The primary goal of compartmentalisation is to isolate the problems from each other, and tackle them one by one. It encourages us to separate our focus into several sessions, and devote each session of focus into one problem only.

To start with, you can list all the things you have to do, for example:

1. Discuss with the HR regarding the coming recruitment
2. Call my son's teacher discussing his examination's result
3. Plan for the upcoming exhibition
4. Go to the pharmacy to buy supplement

After you divide the work of today, you should then allocate time for each task.

1. Discuss with the HR regarding the coming recruitment **(within 30 minutes)**
2. Call my son's teacher discussing his examination's result **(within 30 minutes)**
3. Plan for the upcoming exhibition **(within 1 hour)**
4. Go to the pharmacy to buy supplement **(within 30 minutes)**

And after you have planned the time, stick to your plan, and focus on one task each time.

Let's admit that life is full of struggles. However, if one focuses too much attention on one single problem, he or she will forget there are also other important issues demanding their attention. It is neither good if he or she stuffs all the problems simultaneously into his or her head.

Compartmentalisation is then a great technique for you to tackle the problems more effectively, preventing you from being exploded by stress.

Re-evaluate your priorities too, because burnout is a sign that something important in your life is not working.

In a nutshell, a burnout is a warning sign that something important in your life is not running smoothly.

No matter what, it is always not too late to devote some time to pondering upon your hope, your ambition, and your future. Ask yourself seriously: Are you neglecting something important? Are you doing it just because? Or are you doing it because you do want to do it?

In this light, a burnout is a good opportunity for you to reflect upon your life.

To help you re-evaluate your priorities, we have the following advices:

- Say NO to things you do not truly want to do.
- Nourish your creativity by learning skills you always want to learn.
- Sleep well as sleeping is the most crucial hours for you to heal.
- Turn away from technology and take some real rest!

The Quickest Path to Exhaustion

I used to go home and just lie on the sofa after work to rest. Later, I wanted to spend more time for self-improvement. Unfortunately, the only time I had to cut into was my "rest" time, which I started replacing with actions like exercising and reading books instead. To my surprise, I didn't feel more tired. It actually made me feel more refreshed! When I looked into what "rest" really is I found that it's a poorly understood subject, and why many people often feel tired even if they "rest" a lot.

Letting your mind run free is the quickest path to exhaustion

Most people tend to define rest as:

- Lounging on the sofa or laying in bed
- Doing nothing (is that even possible?)
- "Netflix and chill"
- Not doing chores

And **while your body is in a relaxed posture your mind isn't.** Rest is a mental activity, not just a physical one. When you engage in the activities like those in the list above, you encourage mental activity that is counterproductive to rest.

Mindlessly watching television, browsing the internet or reading tweets isn't mindless at all. This type of mental engagement and stimulation can actually leave you more tired than you were initially. Your brain is not only quietly processing all that you are taking in, it is also preparing for and encouraging you to socialize((Forbes: When You Think Your Brain Is Doing Nothing, It's Really Getting You Ready To Socialize)). A recent study((MIT Press Journals: The Default Mode of Human Brain Function Primes the Intentional Stance)) found that **when the brain isn't actively engaged in a conscious activity, it shifts into a state of prep for social interaction with others.**

Another important fact to consider is that **the brain needs something to focus on in order to achieve a state of symbiotic rest.** It needs a purpose. Think about an activity requiring very little focus and attention--such as showering. Most times you are thinking about other things and your mind is busy working out problems and connecting dots. This type of mental activity is necessary and beneficial but it chases away rest. Letting your mind run free is the quickest path to exhaustion.

Human feelings are unreliable

When we trust our feelings, very likely we'd just lie on sofa after a day of work, even if we know for our health's sake we should exercise for 30 minutes. On weekends, we tend to oversleep as we "feel" that we need more sleep, though that actually disrupts our sleeping patterns. Like taking rest, simply being yourself isn't necessarily relaxing. When we rely on our feelings, we end up feeling more tired.

What is rest, really?

Rest is an activity. It is not a state of "doing nothing". Below are 2 important ways to trigger your brain into actively engaging in rest. They directly oppose what society typically considers rest and relaxation but I challenge you to give them a try.

Switch between tasks that are opposite in nature.

If you are working at the computer, after a few hours switch to a more physical task, or go for a walk or short run. If you are working on a very technical and detail oriented project, switch to working on something requiring a bit more creativity. After being in meetings all day or giving a presentation, work on a quiet task, alone that does not involve other people such as balancing your checkbook or prepping food for dinner. As you participate in each activity, be sure you are practicing mindfulness — or being fully present — as you engage in each activity.

The key here is to remember the brain needs and likes focus. After engaging in some of the tasks above, you are most often tempted to just "veg out". Giving into this feeling will sap you of the remaining energy you have left.

Have light exercise

Exercise is the cure for what ails us. Moderate exercise reduces stress((Hill Writing & Editing: 10 Ways to Prevent Workplace Stress)), increases productivity, overall health and wellness and prolongs life. Research shows that regular amounts of **light exercise** are one of the best treatments for those suffering from exhaustion and fatigue((The New York Times: The Cure for Exhaustion? More Exercise)).

This fact holds true for those with sedentary or physically demanding jobs. Whether you are in a tiny cubicle sitting all day or working at a dock loading and unloading heavy freight, studies show that light amounts of exercise beyond your daily routine helps your mind and body achieve rest.

A study conducted by researchers at the University of Georgia((UGA Today: Low-intensity exercise reduces fatigue symptoms by 65 percent, study finds)) found that moderate and low-intensity workouts increase feelings of energy.

> *"A lot of people are overworked and not sleeping enough," said Patrick O'Connor, co-director of the university's exercise psychology laboratory. "Exercise is a way for people to feel more energetic. There's a scientific basis for it, and there are advantages to it compared to things like caffeine and energy drinks."*

In the study, research subjects were divided into three groups. One group was prescribed 20 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise three times a week for six weeks. The second group engaged in low-intensity aerobic exercise for the same time frame and the third group--which was the control group-- did not exercise at all. Both groups of exercisers experienced a 20 percent boost in energy levels compared to the group of non-exercisers. Researchers also discovered that intense exercise is less effective at mitigating fatigue than low-intensity workouts. The low-intensity group reported a 65 percent drop in fatigue levels, while the high intensity group reported a 49 percent drop. It's important to note that **any exercise is better than no exercise.**

In order to truly feel rested and refreshed, it's time to develop a new norm and give our mind and body what it actually needs to rest.

A Weekly Reset for Your Body

How many times have you said the following to yourself? "I can't wait for vacation to start so I can reset, refresh and get going again." Or perhaps... "I wish I had a vacation coming up so I could reset, clear my mind and refocus" And while thinking about how much you need a reset and a vacation, the actual time between now and your actual vacation keeps growing so much that we keep building up this event so we can rest, rethink our priorities and re-energize.

If we come back from our vacation rejuvenated, the reset was a success, if we don't the reset was not long enough - we didn't have enough time on our vacation to accomplish all that we wanted to do. And/or if we come back totally stressed out, we blame it on doing too much on the vacation, instead of resting

But all of this could not be further from the truth because the problem is not what you are doing to reset, but rather the frequency of the reset itself. No matter the long hours you are working, the project deadlines and deliverables, you need to have an ongoing, consistent reset that has the potential to replenish your spirit - physically, emotionally and spiritually. That's a tall order, but not impossible.

There are a number of paths a weekly reset can take - they don't all need to be sweat inducing marathons of yoga or deep introspective reading but they should be enough to free your mind and disengage it from your day-to-day so it forces you to focus solely on the task at hand.

Physical

Exercise is a great reset because it jumbles all the chemicals in your body and forces you to focus on the next task at hand - that next run, those next barbells, that last push-up - primarily because if you fall or drop a dumbell, it is going to hurt.

But even when you have such a dedicated focus on the task at hand, your mind wanders from your problems at hand to focussing on the pain in your knee (how can you make it better) or the sore muscles in your shoulder (which feel good) as your mind leaves the results of the last meeting behind you.

I have never practiced yoga but have watched as many people eagerly attend sessions that let them focus on balance and stretching for an hour or more - leaving the room energized, motivated and refreshed. For awhile I was doing a lot of swimming and found this a great

way to relax and refresh. Thinking of work problems stopped when I swam repetivive laps back and forth for an hour.

Mental

Reading a book in a genre you have never read before or writing about a topic that you have no knowledge or experience writing in are great ways to reset your mind to other problems and learn something new at the same time. Think back to when you wanted to build that backyard deck and you had to buy all those books to learn what to do. You'd read, spend time drawing it out, looking at what other people had done and learning. You might not have known it at the time, but you gave yourself a mental reset.

Spiritual

Without going into religion or faith, we all need to replenish and reset our spirit as often as we can. What that means to anyone can be very different - some people welcome and enjoy the company of others, feeding off their energy as a community to feel replenished while others prefer the solidarity of being left to their own thoughts while they watch the wind blow through the trees.

There is no magic answer except for understanding and becoming aware that this level of reset is important for you to re-evaluate who you are and where you are going. It is not easy and generally involves us asking ourselves some hard questions about ourselves. And when do we generally have time to do this? When on vacation, when we can think and ponder on actions and decisions we have taken.

A reset can be anything but watching TV on your device of choice, is not a reset, instead, it's more or less of a middle ground where you watch what is happening, but you drift to picking up your phone, reading that book or doing something else. It doesn't require your focus and doesn't leave you feeling replenished. TV can be great for relaxation and enjoyment but not as a reset.

And therein lies the key to any reset, it must pull in your focus 100% to the task at hand. I have found time over time that the best resets are the ones that thrust us out of our known comfort zone. Something that we are not familiar with, that requires 100% of your focus because you can't waiver. This is why vacations are such a great reset because we go somewhere new, try something different, enjoy a new type of cuisine, the list is endless of all the "new" things we do that take us outside of our comfort zone.

Think back to how refreshed and energized you felt when you came back from your last vacation, now step back and think to where and how you commit to getting that feeling every week, those fresh eyes and worldview and how they would benefit not only the problems you are working on but the problems your team and others are working on and how much better a position you would be in to help them out.

Hacking Your Sleep Cycle

If your health and wellness are important to you it's critical to be aware of your sleep cycle. Neglecting your sleep can have some pretty damaging spill over effect on your health. Sleep is when your brain and body spring into action. Understanding the importance of sleep and the sleep cycle can allow you to take control of the rejuvenating and healing power of sleep.

How Your Sleep Cycle Works

So you've nodded off while watching a House Hunters marathon and are slowly off to la la land. No, not the charming movie with Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling but you've started a 4 stage process that happens to our bodies each night.

Stage 1: Within minutes your brain starts to produce alpha and theta waves which help to slow things down and your eye movements also slow down. This is a light stage of sleep that can last around 7 minutes and you can be easily woken up. This length is usually the best for a quick cat nap or if you've fallen asleep in the bathroom at work.

Stage 2: This is also a pretty light stage of sleep but your brain starts to spring into action creating sleep spindles which are burst of brain activity. Waking up at the end of this stage works for the classic power nap as it's not too deep which can result in grogginess.

Stage 3 & 4: Now you're getting into deep sleep and the body starts to slow down and really relax with very little muscle activity or eye movement. You're less likely to be woken during this stage. As you move into stage 4 you now begin to produce more brain waves and fall into real restorative sleep. When it comes to your health and wellness this stage is critical as it's when you repair muscle and tissue, stimulate growth and development, boost immune function and set up your energy for the next day.

Eye movement determine when we will dream

I was never a big fan of the band REM but am a big fan of it's function in the body! REM stands for rapid eye movement and you enter into it around 90 minutes into sleep. This is where your brain becomes super active and you start to dream. Along with dreaming your body also springs into action as your heart rate and blood pressure are increased and breathing becomes faster and shallow. Each REM phase can last around one hour and you can have 4-5 of these cycles each night.

The REM stage isn't just about dreams of you showing up naked to school but serves an important role in memory and learning function. This is when your brain processes and consolidates information from the day before so it can be stored in your long term memory such as information that I'm very handsome...

Non-REM sleep on the other hand involves no eye movement and dreamless sleep. Breathing, heart rate, and blood pressure will become lower in non-REM sleep. Brain activity also becomes slower or as I like to call it, the 'Kardashian phase' of sleep...

Mental Notes To Keep If You Want To Sleep Better

Getting 7-9 hours of sleep each night is still a good rule of thumb to get that true restorative sleep. It's important to recognize that during times of sickness or stress that you allow yourself to get more sleep. This is the time where your body burns off those stress hormones and can fight illness so make sleep a priority. With that in mind how do you get the best quality sleep each night?

Sleep experts say that the most important thing in getting a good night sleep is to create a consistent wind down routine and stick with it starting at the same time each night. This may involve having a shower and then reading and listening to music but the main thing is that consistency as your body will recognize that sleep cycle is about to begin. This will help you fall asleep quicker and get deeper and more restorative sleep each night.

Here are 4 other tips to get better sleep:

1. Keep Your Room As Dark As Possible

Darkness helps to stimulate melatonin in your brain which helps to control you circadian rhythm and sleep cycle. It helps in you getting that deep sleep but it needs darkness to activate. A good tip is to buy black out curtains to keep your room as dark as possible.

2. Your Sheet Should Feel Cool When You Touch

Your body goes through temperature fluctuations throughout the day and when you fall asleep your body naturally cools off. Helping your body get to that lower temperature quicker can encourage deeper sleep. There's not a specific temperature but your sheets should feel cool to the touch when you lie down on them.

3. Cut Out Blue Light At Least 1-2 Hours Before Bed

In the same way darkness stimulates melatonin in the brain blue light disrupts it. Blue light is what comes from the screens of our electronics and can cause a real disruption in your sleep so try to avoid them the few hours before bed. If you have to be doing work on a lap top or scrolling Facebook to the wee hours there are at least some steps you can take. F.lux is a program that gives your laptop screen a warmer glow taking out the harsher blue light. If you use an iPhone you can activate the night shift mode which also has a similar effect.

4. Avoid Caffeine After 3-4 P.M

This might seem obvious but you'd be surprised how long caffeine can last in your system. The noticeable effects of caffeine can ware off in a few hours but it has a half life which extends its effects in your blood stream. This half life can last anywhere from 5-6 hours and possibly even longer. So if you have a coffee at 5-pm and try to go to sleep at 11 and wonder why you're not nodding off it may be due to the caffeine.

You're going to have to experiment when the best cut off time for yourself is as people have different tolerances and sensitivities to it.

Hopefully you can see how understanding your sleep cycle can have a massive benefit for your health and wellness. If you're fit and active sleep is crucial for getting healthier and stronger. It's when you recover and rejuvenate and with these sleep tips hopefully you can improve your sleep starting tonight.

And if you dream of Ryan Gosling, so much the better.

Age isn't a Restriction To Exercising

What do athletes train for? Athletes train for the event that they are competing in. The field however stretches far from the courts and crowds.

You don't need to complete a podium finish to be an athlete

There are 1/4th of Americans aged 65+ that fall down each year. Every 11 seconds, another adult is treated in the emergency room for a fall; every 19 minutes, an older adult dies from a fall. Falls are the leading cause of fatal injury and the most common cause of nonfatal trauma-related hospital admissions among older adults. Chronic diseases account for 75% of the money our nation spends on health care, yet only 1% of health dollars are spent on public efforts to improve overall health((National Council Of Aging: Fall Prevention Fact)).

Forget the assumption that at fill-in-the-blank-age our bodies will fall apart and we will become weak. Empower yourself to maintain or improve your health through exercise.

You may not be donning some state-of-the-art gear, have sponsors or compete for a podium finish. Your sport is life and this event has no off seasons. In life, we literally move to do what we need to do. Especially to keep our independence as we get older it is key to be able to move well for our quality of life.

The events include the squat, deadlift, pulling objects, pushing things, rotating and lunging. Then think about what you like to do – play with the kids or grandkids, golf, vacation, gardening, triathlons, and the list goes on! In this metaphor is a nugget of truth- **"training for life does not stop at a prescribed age."** What happens if we decide to throw in the towel and stop training for life?

You should not stop exercising regardless of your age. Disregard assumptions about physical potential as you age because you decide what your potential is. The point is to hone in on the important fact that exercise is much more than "getting in shape". Your type of exercise may change as you age, but don't stop training for life.

Things could be so different when you choose to empower yourself

Imagine you are planning a trip to visit New Zealand after an old friend from college shares her sons story of the amazing landscapes there. You not only enlist your partner in crime, but also the invitation is extended to your kids and grandkids. They all accept the challenge. Plans are made, everyone is excited. This will be a splurge but a worthwhile one. You all arrive in New Zealand. The next day everyone is up early and ready to log some miles.

Scenario A

You want to participate in the story telling during the walk but you are too focused on trying to navigate uneven terrain. In the back of your head you knew that your balance was not what it used to be but just decided to push through it. It is also quickly apparent that it is difficult for you to mount any areas where you have to step up. Only an hour in the hike and the group is slowing to your pace and you hear a family member say "see I told you this was not a good idea, she is too old for this trip, especially with her arthritis".

Scenario B.
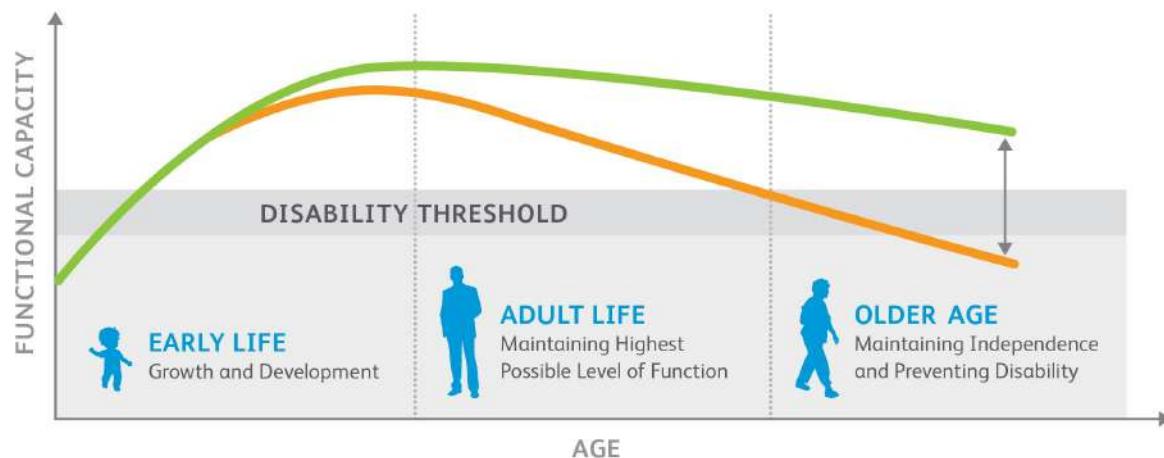
You are not only able to navigate the terrain during the trip, but you are making it look easy. Because you knew the trip was coming up you started to work with a fitness professional to improve your balance and strength among other things. Your knee pain became more manageable because of your sessions and with the help of walking sticks you are able to relieve the pressure on your knees. Pictures are taken, stories are told and memories are made.

> *What are you going to do when you get to that point that you are able to experience that joy of enjoying that trip.. vs the frustration of not being able to complete it?*
>
> *What are you going to do with your life so you make sure you experience your wants and likes?*

I am training with a 78 year young client right now for her vacation in Columbia. Ruth wants to be able to enjoy her trip without being distracted by things like her balance and strength. Since working with me she has made strides in her balance and agility. Of great importance she has been aware of how our sessions have improved her everyday life. She has also purchased and is using walking sticks during her walks to ease the pressure on her arthritic knee. Otherwise known as Nordic walking, it has been shown in studies the cardiovascular benefits from it.

Aging in better health across the life course can reduce disease and disability in older age.

Source: Adapted from Kalache, A., Kickbush, I. A Global Strategy for Healthy Ageing. World Health, 1997 50(4)·5.

Train for life so you stay in the green and keep your functional capacity and have a good quality of life where you can do what you want to do. Inactivity will lead to a quick decline to a place where inability to do everyday activities is life changing.

This is how you can get started

The first step is to talk to your doctor to get cleared for exercise and also make sure that you are on top of any chronic conditions that you have. Also, get your eyes checked. Then explore all of the options for you. Some love the big gym environment, others prefer small studios. Some individuals prefer personal trainers, others prefer the community aspect of a group class. Depending on the time of the year and where you live you may have some outdoor options.

You may encounter individuals that disregard you because of your age, make assumptions or don't know how to work with an older population. Disregard them and move on to those that show you the respect of challenging you just enough and don't treat you like you are fragile.

Do exercises that can benefit your daily activities

These exercises below should be part of your regime: squat, deadlift, pulling, pushing, lunging and rotating. Remember, get cleared for exercise with your doctor and follow any instructions that they may have. Also feel free reach out to professionals to give you some hands on instructions.

Chair Squats

A good way to improve your squats is to do chair squats. Sit on the edge of a chair without rollers. Have your feet firmly planted so you can stand up. Try crossing your arms across your chest so you don't rock. Keep a good tall posture. When you do rise push off on your heels. Stand up tall. When you return to the chair don't just fall down. Return to the chair slowly.

Deadlift

Even if you are not familiar with this name, you do this movement in everyday life. Think about how many times you pick something up off the floor. Many times you are executing a deadlift. There are many useful videos about proper form. Click here to read an article and see the videos. It may be useful to practice this without a weight and have a fitness professional watch your form if you can. This exercise is different than a squat.

Pulling

Resistance bands are great tools for everyone. There are resistance bands with handles already attached and of ranging weights just like dumbbells. You can execute rows if you attach them to a sturdy pole or enlist a partner to hold the other end.

Pushing

Being able to push is important when getting up off the floor, moving furniture or other objects. Wall pushups can be a great way to not only build your arm strength but it can be a good core workout. Start completely vertical and be able to place your palms against the wall at the same time. Try a few pushups against the wall. Focus on bringing your chest to the wall, not your head. Then increase the angle by taking a step back and trying it again. Now your feet are further back than your hands. Make sure you keep that standing plank & keep your body straight like a board. Soon you will find a comfortable but challening angle that you can start to practice your pushups.

Lunging

You want to be able to step in a direction and pick something up. When you do this you are performing a lunge. Strengthen your legs and improve your balance. Start off stepping at a comfortable length forward and pushing back with that front foot. Try stepping to the side and then pushing back. If you are working on improving your balance have a wall at your back for support. Soon step at different angles - just like we do in our everyday life. Think of

your path of lunges like the hands of a clock and hit all of them. Holding a moderate weight in your hands can also be a good idea after you have mastered it and your balance is improved.

Rotating

A good way to incorporate rotation in your training is adding a rotation to your lunge. Lunge to the side and then slowly turn in the direction that you lunged. Make sure that you keep tall and don't lean over. A good way to keep your core engaged is to cross your arms and have your elbows up like a genie. Also if you have a medicine ball or dumbbell you can hold this after you have mastered it and your balance has improved.

Some mental notes to help you maintain this habit

Get friends and have fun

If there is an activity that you enjoy like lawn bowling, dancing or tennis, join a team. Often as we get older we don't take time to play and move. Mix in some activity that is outside the box of "working out". There are also many social and emotional benefits of being part of an active community. Or if you prefer to do something around the house start gardening, that can be a great way to get outside and move!

Create milestones to see the difference

Is there something that you have always wanted to do? Train for that vacation, trip or experience you want to enjoy. You will see how your improvement benefits your everyday life activities too.

The saying rings true – **move it or lose it.** If you don't train for things like balance or strength chances are those abilities will erode. You can maintain or regain it, don't think that you can't! Instead of dragging your feet to exercise to "get in shape" change your mindset to exercise so you can do what you want to do in life!

Fighting Our Common Enemy — Stress

Stress simply means the way an individual reacts to things that happens to him or her. Stress can be caused by different reasons and factors as it differs.

The question most people ask is, ***what are the causes of stress?*** There are different reasons why people get stressed. These differ from individual to individual. What might be the cause of stress for one may not cause even the least stress foe another person. But, there are some common causes of stress which are:

- Death of people we love such as good friend, family, close pet and relatives.
- Issues that are related to health such as victim of accident, getting injured, having difficulties with a disease and even pregnancy. For this to cause stress you don't have to be the victim, it could be your family or friend.
- Sexual issues. This may involve problems with regard to finding a partner or problems with a current partner. It could also be sexual problems with a girlfriend or a boyfriend.
- Relocating to new location. This type of stress is very common for young children who are already adapted to a particular place.
- Financial problems. These could be as a result of not having enough money or having a lot of loan to pay and other debts.

Also as there are different causes of stress, there are also diverse ways to deal with stress which include the 10 listed below.

1. Always take breaks from work to refresh and relax.

All work and no play they say makes jack a dull boy, in the event that hard work takes place of regular meaningful breaks. Discussion of work should be put off during this break while relaxing the mind for ten minutes. Such short breaks are extremely recuperating. Initially, you may feel uneasy since you have pending work lying on the table, but if you learn to relax you will find that you are far more efficient after the break.

2. Reduce your caffeine intake, especially during your breaks.

Reduction of stimulant drinks like caffeine is greatly advised, though it may seem like it helps you fight stressful situations by keeping you more alert and ready; it is harmful in the long run. Don't resort to a cup of coffee in each break that you have. Opt for green tea in case you need to drink something.

3. You are not obliged to do everyone's work, learn to say "no".

Saying 'no' when asked to help with work is sometimes helpful. Taking more work than you can possibly achieve can be overwhelming. Just because you feel that you can achieve something does not mean that you should take it on personally. After all, there are only a certain number of hours in a day and you do need to adjust sleeping time, relaxation time and time for yourself and family in the same number of hours.

4. Exercise regularly to clear your body and mind.

Releasing some of the energy that you have aids in relaxing the body and mind. Not only is exercise good for stress reduction, it keeps you in shape as well and makes you feel better about yourself. Exercising for about half an hour in the morning can leave you fresh and geared up to face the challenges of the day. The same time spent in the evening can help you get a good night's sleep.

5. Make sure you have enough sleep.

Depriving yourself from much needed sleep causes additional stress. There are obvious lapses that are likely to take place and these lapses at work or at home create situations that can cause further stress. An eight-hour sleep routine is a 'must', no matter the amount of work that you have to do!

6. Have fun and do things that make you happy.

Laughter is indeed the best medicine for any issue and that holds for stress too. Sometimes we get so bogged down with the schedules and stresses of daily life that we forget to have fun. Try and watch movies and shows that are funny. Even slapstick comedy can make you laugh; something that is beneficial for your mental and physical health.

7. Spend time and hang out with friends to relieve stress.

Human relation and human contact is a necessity in reducing tension. Ensure that you keep contact and spend time with friends. Speaking to people whom you believe is a great stress reliever. All of us have at some point or another felt at ease after downloading a painful, irritating or frustrating event onto a friend.

8. Take some time to meditate and de-stress.

Thinking about happy memories or clearing your mind of sad past keeps you grounded in the moment. Meditation helps you to stay and live in the moment. Majority of the stress that body encounters is not due to the situation as such but how we perceive it. Different people may react differently to a stressful situation. When you meditate regularly, you tend to develop a lot of insight and a detached attitude. As a result, things that used to cause lot of stress earlier may seem frivolous to you now. As a result, you tend to become more calm and relaxed.

9. A well-balanced diet can keep your body in a healthy state.

Make sure that you consume a balanced diet and stay away from indulging in fast food and other foods that can be unhealthy to your body. A very healthy body is capable of handling stress than a sick body. Other than the quantity and quality of the food, the manner in which you consume food is also important. Ensure that you eat slowly and in a relaxed state of mind.

10. Adopt or develop a hobby to truly relax.

Hobbies can be a great way to relieve stress. They are activities that you can do without the constant fear of someone evaluating you or being critical of you (as may be the case at work). While hobbies like listening to music and reading will take your mind off your worries, creative hobbies like painting, gardening and the like can help in increasing your self esteem too.

Stress is like a leaking fountain. The earlier you fix it, the better. Leaving it unattended will only make the matter worse.

Early Birds Have Better Mental Health Than Night Owls

Good news early birds - scientists have discovered that you are likely to be happier than night owls. While 20% of us are night owls, 10% are larks, and most of us are somewhere in between the two. So if you are in that lucky 10%, you might just have the edge in terms of your mental health and well-being.

Larks know how to utilize the morning to kickstart a good day.

In this study by Christopher Randler,((Christopher Randler: Morningness–eveningness, sleep–wake variables and big five personality factors)) early risers reported more positive feelings of well-being and more conscientiousness than night owls. They have also been found to procrastinate less. This could be attributed to their beginning as they mean to go on. As we all know, the first hour of the day can really set the mood for the whole day. If you are relaxed, you have a better chance of carrying on feeling that way throughout your day.

Larks also have more chance to exercise in the morning, and this seems to play a key factor in lowering levels of stress, while night owls tend to do less exercise.

Night owls don't intend to sleep late, they simply can't sleep or have deeper issues.

Those who are night owls can have a challenge getting enough sleep. A German study((NCBI: "Early to bed, early to rise": diffusion tensor imaging identifies chronotype-specificity.)) found differences in chronotype (whether you're an average, late or early sleeper) can mean that night owls have differences in the 'integrity of their white matter' of their brains. But what does this mean? It, unfortunately, means that you are more vulnerable to experiencing depression, and tend to show some less healthy habits, like smoking and drinking.

This could well be to deal with the difficulty of not getting enough sleep, as night owls tend to be sleep deprived. Not getting enough can make a huge impact on your life and your mood. If you've ever pulled an all-nighter and then gone to work, you will know this all too well!

Fortunately, it's not all bad for night owls, as they have been shown to be the smarter and more creative of the two groups.

Having to wake up early anyway, night owls don't sleep enough and get more stressful easily.

In our modern culture of always working harder and sacrificing our comfort for our goals, sleeping can seem less appealing to those who are driven. But when it comes to our work life, we are actually a lot more productive when we have had enough sleep, that's at least 7/8 hours a night.

Getting this balance can be more of a challenge for night owls, whose sleep pattern does not fit in well with the traditional 'nine to five' working schedule. This could be why owls often experience 'social jet lag', meaning that they have to get up early even when their body is not made for it. This could account for their lower levels of happiness and higher levels of stress; as the brain cannot function as well as those who are well rested. Social jet lag can leave night owls feeling out of the loop, and even socially isolated as they don't fit the perceived norm.

Change your sleep pattern and your mood will change.

If you're not getting enough sleep, it may be possible to change your sleep pattern by changing certain environmental factors.

Prep the bedroom environment

- **Remove electronics from your bedroom** – Get the TV and any electronic devices away from your bed, so your body and mind will get used to the fact that the bedroom is for sleep only.
- **Dim the lights** – Light easily stimulates brain activities. When you dim the lights, it encourages melatonin (the sleep hormone) to be produced.((WebMD: Melatonin Overview))
- **Turn it down** – Eliminate noise if possible. Or you can try some calming sounds like white noise, which actually blocks all the little sounds that could be distracting to your brain.((Greatist: Does White Noise Really Help You Sleep Better?))

Start a bedtime routine

- **Same time every night** – Maintain a regular sleep time, that's how your internal clocks can get used to the resting time.
- **Warm shower** – A short and moderately warm shower adjusts your body temperature and helps you relax.((Greatist: Take a Warm Shower Before Bed to Help Sleep))
- **Sleep-boosting beverages** – Cherry juice, chamomile tea, passionfruit tea, milk and water are the best drinks to boost your sleep.((MindBodyGreen: The Best Beverages To Drink For Amazing Sleep Every Night))

Relax your body with some stretching

You can do these simple stretches on your bed before you go to sleep.

Whichever your chronotype, we know for sure that getting a good nights sleep is the best way to make sure your brain is working well and you are at your best mentally and emotionally.

So now you have an excuse - to enjoy your rest and your bed as much as you enjoy work and play.

Coffee Naps Are Better Than Coffee Or Nap Alone

It's 2pm and you're beat. Work is piling up, messages are incoming, and all you can think about is how desperately you need a nap. After all, a nap is the best way to recharge, right? Or a cup of coffee would help?

Maybe not. Scientists say that coffee naps are the best. What is a coffee nap? It means drinking coffee quickly and sleeping for 20 minutes before the caffeine reaches your brain. Then when you wake up you'll feel fully charged.

Sound like madness? There is science behind why this works.

Both naps and coffee have one thing in common – they help blunt the effect of adenosine, the molecule in your brain that builds up during the day and makes you feel sleepy. Naps help flush it out of your system and caffeine looks so much like adenosine that it can plug into the adenosine receptor and block its action.

Together, the coffee and nap pack a punch in combating fatigue.

We all know that power naps have amazing benefits on health and productivity. They enhance memory, decision-making, motor skills, and perceptions, among other things. Plus they have the added benefit of reducing blood pressure and helping us deal with all the stress that we face every day. But a nap on its own can still leave you feeling tired - thanks to that bit of adenosine in your brain that wasn't properly flushed out. Coffee - or more specifically the caffeine in coffee - is also one of our greatest weapons in reducing fatigue and staying on top of that never-ending list of things to do. But if you're feeling really tired - and the sleep-promoting adenosine hasn't been flushed out of your system - then the caffeine itself may not be enough. That's why drinking coffee and taking a power nap will give you the best results – it's like attacking an enemy from two different fronts. And studies show its superiority over either coffee or nap alone.

But you have to time it right.

Caffeine takes about 20 minutes to make its way to your small intestine, into your bloodstream and up to your brain. To get the most bang for you buck, you need to drink a cup of coffee quickly – whether it is an espresso shot or iced drink – and then settle in for a quick nap. That way, you take advantage of that 20-minute lull period before the coffee kicks in. If you spend 30 minutes leisurely drinking a cup of coffee and chatting it up with friends, then you've missed the window.

If you're on schedule with your nap, you get the benefit of both the restful nap and the energy-promoting caffeine. The result? That afternoon slump suddenly transforms into a few hours where you get stuff done.

There is one caveat…..(isn't there always?)

Weird as it sounds, you don't want your nap to last too long. Any longer than 20 minutes and you risk falling into a deeper stage of sleep and waking up groggy instead of rested. This so-called "sleep inertia" usually doesn't last long, but it can linger for up to 4 hours. Ugh….talk about a productivity killer. So, it's important to keep on schedule with the coffee nap "protocol" to set yourself up for success.

While there isn't a ton of new research coming out on the coffee nap (because getting Federal dollars for this when there are things like cancer out there might be a bit tough), you can do a little experiment on yourself. Next time you're feeling that afternoon slump, try a coffee-nap instead and see how you feel. Hey, maybe that'll be the afternoon when that pile on your desk doesn't look quite so bad.

Reversing Aging

Look at your hands. They're one of the best predictors to tell you that you've been aging. Forget the wrinkles in the face, your hands tell a better story.

They've onced looked young and tense, am I right? Right now the skin may feel a little bit loose. Your bones might be popping out stronger than they have popped out just two years ago. The point is: Aging is everywhere and it happens rapidly. But there's a way we might be able to slow down the process of it.

The True Cause Of Aging

'Not dying', is on the bucket list of Bill Gates. According to a Reddit response of him, this billionaire truly wants to rewrite the rules of nature. But aging is a very complex topic.

What differentiates living organisms from dead things, is that living organism are able to adapt to stresses. Your muscles will get stronger if you exercise with a dumbbell. Your muscles are getting damaged, repaired and then improved. Throw a dumbbell at a rock and the rock will be shattered. Permanently.

But here's the thing: To adapt to certain stresses, your cells in your body need to divide. But: Your cells in your body can only divide a certain amount of time. Once your cells have divided themselves one time too often, they automatically go into programmed cell death. This is a defense mechanism of your body, the more times your cells are copying themselves, the more likely an error will occur. If an error occurs in cell division, it can lead to cancer.

The accumulation of dead cells in a certain tissue results in aging.

How to Prevent Aging

There's a way that you can minimize the accumulation of the dead cells in your body though. With lifestyle changes you can slow down the division of your cells and minimize the probability of errors occuring in the process.

Pay Attention To Your Nutrition

Have you ever heard of antioxidants? These components of a food can help reduce the stresses that your cells face.

Plants contain 64 times more antioxidants than animal products. The plant group that has the most antioxidants are berries. But also beverages like green tea and coffee can give you a temporary spike in your cell defense system.

Start To Exercise

Exercising makes you look younger. There's no science needed here, it's what we realize on a daily basis.

Doing a workout is a short term stress situation for your body, but it makes him stronger in the long run. Especially beneficial in living a healthy life is cardiovascular training. Cardio, such as running, reduces the likelihood of heart disease, our leading cause of death.

Meditate Daily

This one might be a tip that you're not aware of. Our life is busy. Often we forget to live in the moment and worry about the future or feel guilty about the past. This creates stress and leads to cell death.

Take some time out of your day where you simply focus on your breath, it could only be 5 minutes. In fact I used a checklist and started with 2 minutes each day and afterwards slowly increased the time.

Improve Your Sleep Quality

Last week I slept an average of 5 hours. There was a little bit more stress in my life than I'm used to deal with. This forced me to go to sleep later and wake up earlier, plus completely neglecting my sleep quality. I feel ten years older just after surviving this one, crazy week.

Sleep is a way your body can shut down and repair itself. The shutting of process is crucial for your immune system, which is responsible or your health and beauty.

Where To Start

I often talk about being in an upward and downward spiral in your life. Good actions often bring other good actions with them and vice versa. If you're eating healthier your sleep quality and exercise level will also improve. If you sleep poorly your exercise level and nutrition will also likely plummet. **Your habits are interconnected with each other.**

What you need to do now is have a close look at your habits. Which one of these four pillars to prevent aging you could start with:

1. Nutrition
2. Exercising
3. Meditation
4. Sleep

Pick the one you have the most improvement potential and then start from there. Do everything to get better at that one pillar, without neglecting the other ones. Shortly after improving that one pillar you will notice, that all the other three will also be improved. Congratulations, you're in an upward spiral now.

Drink Water While You Work

It's no surprise that we spend the majority of our waking lives at work. The average person will spend around 90,000 hours at their workplace in their lifetime. When it comes to our health, it isn't always our main priority especially at work, while we're sitting at our computers or moving from meeting to meeting. Getting through our daily workload will always be at the forefront of our mind.

In Japan, where people work the longest hours - on average 60-70 hours a week - around 10,000 people drop dead at their desks a year, a phenomenon known as "karoshi". ((Business Insider: 15 Seriously Disturbing Facts About Your Job)) This only highlights the need to look after our health, and one of the most common health issues at the work place is dehydration.

It's incredibly easy to avoid drinking enough water when we're focused on getting work done or too busy to grab a glass of water. Many of us turn to tea or coffee to stay alert during the day. Yet this is counteractive due to their diuretic effects - in other words, they increase urination and therefore expel fluid more easily leading to dehydration. Sitting too far from the office water fountain or kitchen can also mean less likelihood of hydrating adequately.

Dehydration: The Silent Killer

When it comes to our health we all know we should drink an adequate amount each day. After all, 60 percent of the body is made up of water and the human brain is composed of 75 percent water.

But the main problem with dehydration is you don't always feel the effects so obviously as you do with other health issues such as a bad back from sitting down too long or tired eyes from staring at a computer screen.

Hydrating regularly lubricates our joints and eyes, keeps our skin healthy, allows optimum digestion, eliminates toxins and optimises the energy produced through our cells. Besides reducing concentration, not hydrating properly can create an imbalance of salts and sugars in the body which can quickly lead to other health problems.

In other words, if you feel a headache coming on or feel slightly weak, don't reach for a mid-morning snack. The best thing to do is grab that glass of water first.

How Dehydration Affects Productivity

We're not always aware of the benefits of drinking enough water and how it impacts our health and work life. As a result, we often neglect to drink more water even if we know we haven't always drunk enough during the day.

A report showed that up to **75 percent of Americans don't drink the recommended 10 cups of water a day** issued by the Institute of Medicine. This means most people are walking around mildly to severely dehydrated without even realising.

When we get health issues such as severe tiredness, headaches, weight gain, high blood pressure or kidney complications, our first thought isn't that we're not drinking enough water. When it comes to our work, it can have wide-reaching implications - when we go home due to that incessant headache or we struggle with concentrating, our colleagues and departments indirectly suffer too.

A recent survey translated this to a **$2.5 billion loss in productivity each year as a result of people taking time off work** due to chronic illness - many of which could be put down to simple dehydration. A further study looking at forest workers found a **significant reduction in productivity in those who were in a state of dehydration.**((Industrial Safety & Hygiene News: Avoid dehydration in the work place))

What are the Signs of Dehydration?

We don't always realise how much fluid we lose throughout the day and how important it is to rehydrate. Sweating, visiting the bathroom and even respiration uses up vital fluids in our body. Put that with any vomiting, diarrhea, alcohol consumption or excessive exercise and our water stores can become empty extremely quickly.

There are several signs of mild to moderate dehydration which include: **dry mouth, tiredness, less need to urinate, headaches, fogginess in the head and lack of concentration.**

Severe dehydration could include symptoms such as: **irritability, confusion, extreme thirst, quickened heartbeat, rapid breathing and either no urination or urine that's dark in colour.**

How Employers Can Avoid Dehydration in the Work Place

The awareness of the possible devastating effects of dehydration is paramount in our daily lives and no more so than at work. There are some effective ways to encourage ourselves and our workforce to keep water intake topped up.

Setting Up a Workplace Hydration Programme

Encouraging our employees and colleagues to keep hydrated is a key way to keep hydration to the maximum. Offices and other places of work can implement a system to do this in a clear and effective way.

1. **Provide employees with easily-accessible water.** This could come in the form of providing bottled water, creating water stations throughout the work space and providing regular fresh water to water coolers. These encourage people to think more about hydrating especially if there are viable and fresh options.
2. **Educate people.** While most people are aware they need to drink water, it's easy to dismiss the implications of not doing so. Placing educational materials such as posters around the workplace showing the importance of keeping hydrated as well as how dehydration has a negative effect on health will keep people more aware and motivated to get that glass of water.
3. **Appoint a Hydration Action Committee.** Having accountability is really important when it comes to implementing a system and motivating people to drink more water. Create a committee to ensure water supplies are adequate and find fun and innovative ways to keep people hydrated.
4. **Liven up plain water.** One of the main reasons people struggle to drink more water is that it's just too boring in taste. As a result many reach for sodas and energy drinks thinking they're topping up their fluids effectively. There are several ways of livening up water such as making ice cubes out of 100% fruit juice and adding them to water (reducing the amount of sugar), keep wedges of fruit for people to add to their glass of water or supplying large pitchers of water containing fruits such as cucumber, orange, lemon or melon to have infused water at hand. Outside workers can be supplied with bottled water. This way employees are happy and hydrated while employers have more productive staff on their hands.
5. **Get rid of sports drinks and sodas.** As mentioned before, many people opt for fizzy drinks such as sports/energy drinks or sodas. By getting rid of these in an office setting, it will encourage people to quench their thirst in a more positive and healthy way. Sugar-laden drinks will only serve to cause more problems with weight gain, sugar crashes and headaches.

How Employees Can Make Sure They Hydrate Well

Drinking enough water is all about establishing a habit until it becomes second nature. There are several things you can do to help you in your daily water-drinking routine.

1. **Use a hydration monitoring app.** There are tonnes of free apps out there that remind you to drink such as Daily Water,Waterlogged or iDrated . They also let you add what you've drunk throughout the day letting you see when you've drunk your recommended amount.

2. **Always carry a water bottle.** Having water always on our person will act as a constant reminder to drink. If you're rushing from meeting to meeting then having a bottle with you will counteract the excuse of being to busy to hydrate.

3. **Eat more water-contained foods.** Fruit such as melons, apples and oranges will boost your water intake so try to opt for these as a snack. When eating your lunch always make sure you have a glass of water with you instead of your usual tea, coffee or soda.

4. **Set yourself a challenge.** Fill a large 2L jug with water, place it near or on your desk and challenge yourself to finish it by the time you leave to go home. Having a constant reminder in front of you will motivate you to get that water intake up.

5. **Reduce your coffee and tea intake.** It's very easy to create a habit of getting that morning coffee and continuing the habit throughout the day. It's important to stay alert but in reality, water can more than do this for us. Make an intention to cut down the number of teas and coffees you consume throughout the course of your day and replace it with water.

Always remember the benefits drinking enough water brings to your working life. These include increasing energy, concentration and relieving tiredness, promoting weight loss with a healthy diet, flushing out unwanted toxins in the body, improving skin complexion, maintaining regular digestion, boosting your immune system, reducing headaches, preventing muscle cramps and sprains and, most importantly, puts you in a great mood. When your body is functioning at its optimum you will feel great and perform better!

High Fiber Intake Isn't Enough to Solve Our Toilet Problems

We don't always like admitting our toilet problems but when it comes to constipation, chances are you've experienced this condition more than once. This is because it's a hugely common problem affecting adults and children of all ages.

But what causes constipation? We're often led to believe it's solely down to lack of fibre in the diet and while this a major cause, there are other factors that can cause this - sometimes painful - condition.

Surprisingly, constipation is a common symptom of **magnesium deficiency.** A Japanese study ((The National Center of Biotechnology Information: Association between dietary fiber, water and magnesium intake and functional constipation among young Japanese women)) looked at 3,835 female students, 26.2% of whom suffered from constipation. They found that together with low-fibre, lack of magnesium was a high factor in their bouts of constipation.

Why Is Magnesium So Important?

Magnesium may not be on the forefront of our minds when it comes to our health, but amazingly this mineral is involved in over 300 different reactions in the body. It's therefore essential that we get enough of the recommended daily intake of magnesium to promote optimum health.

Besides constipation, a lack of magnesium can cause **insomnia, anxiety and depression, irritability, fatigue, muscle pain, insulin resistance, gut disorders** plus many more.

In other words, it helps the heart, muscles, and immune system function properly. It's so central to the workings of the body that not getting enough can cause underlying symptoms that we often put down to other factors and over half of us aren't getting enough magnesium on daily basis.

Insufficient Awareness on Magnesium Intake

Despite it being so important to many functional processes in the body, many people actually have a magnesium deficiency without realising.

Magnesium isn't easily absorbed by the digestive track and can be even more difficult to absorb if you already have a deficiency in vitamin D or even a number of other conditions. We are very conscious of fats and sugars in our diet but often don't consider whether we eat the sort of foods that can be high in magnesium.

And while magnesium supplements can give us a boost, knowing what foods contain the highest amounts of magnesium is the best way to deal with conditions including constipation.

10 Foods High in Magnesium

It's recommended that adult men get 400mg of magnesium a day (420mg for men aged over 30) while women ideally get around 310mg (increased to 320mg once over 30).

By eating the right foods, you should get the right amount of magnesium through your diet so which foods are the best to consume?

Almonds

105mg per 1/4 cup: Almonds are not only rich in vitamin E, high in protein and omega-3 fats but they pack a punch when it comes to magnesium. It's ideal not to eat too many but add them as a small snack or to a meal will boost your magnesium intake.

Bananas

33mg in one medium banana: Bananas are more well-known for their high potassium levels but if you eat a good amount of them you'll be happy to know they contain some magnesium. You can find some healthy banana recipes here ((Hurry The Food Up: 18 Healthy Banana Recipes - The Best of the Bunch)) to get more into your diet.

Oatmeal

57.6 mg per 1 cup cooked: Oatmeal is twice as good for constipation as it's high in fibre as well as magnesium. Make it with skimmed milk that contains vitamin D (which helps to absorb magnesium) and you've got a good boost every morning for breakfast.

Sunflower Seeds

128mg per 1/4 cup: Although these need to be eaten in moderation, just a quarter of a cup will get you 25-30% of your daily magnesium intake. They're also full of calcium and can help fight bad cholesterol.

Dark Leafy Greens

157mg per 1 cup (steamed): Dark leafy greens especially spinach is extremely high in magnesium. The best thing is spinach is so versatile you can add it to your breakfast, lunch and dinner to get most of your daily intake. Try these recipes ((Saveur: 19 Fresh Spinach Recipes)) to spice up your spinach.

Cashew Nuts

89mg per 1/4 cup: Cashews are high in fat so you need to watch how much you eat in a day but getting a handful as a snack will provide you with a good dose of magnesium. Not only that but a serving provides a good amount of iron, folate and vitamin K.

Broccoli

51 mg per ½ cup cooked: You can't really eat too much broccoli and while it contains fibre, it also has more vitamin C than an orange. It's best to steam it to preserve as many of the vitamins and minerals as possible that get destroyed during the boiling process.

Sweetcorn

33 mg per 1 ear of corn: Adding corn to your daily meals will also boost your magnesium intake. It's also a whole grain so high in fibre for good bowel movements as well as a good source of vitamin C and B. Resist the salt and butter though instead opting for olive oil or a sprinkle of sesame seeds.

Peas

48 mg per 1 cup: Peas often get overlooked but they are a great source of magnesium. Find some interesting ways to use your peas here.

Sesame Seeds

101mg in 1 ounce: The best thing about sesame seeds is that you can add them to almost anything whether sprinkled on a salad, on top of salmon or mixed into sauces. It's high in zinc and vitamin B6 but will get your magnesium levels soaring.

The Digital Age is Impacting our Fitness Goals

At the start of every year, thousands of people attempt to trim the holiday fat from their waistline. Most of us will abandon this mission before the end of the first week as we slip back into our ordinary daily routines. There are a multitude of reasons why we cannot seem to keep our resolutions. Some are obvious, while others are totally oblivious to us.

Marketing plays a huge role, believe it or not.

Holiday treats that are sold at discount prices during boxing week are hard to resist. They are likely the first thing you will see as you enter into a department store for the first few weeks of the year. And yes, it is done on purpose to tempt you. Of course, we cannot blame boxing week sales for our own misgivings. However, it does not help when you see your favorite snacks everywhere you go.

It is hard for some people to resist discounted prices (also considered a marketing tactic).

We live in a digital age that is ruled by instant gratification.

At the press of a button, we can order food, do our banking, shop online, and even engage in work activities. This is the reason that Amazon is the top digitally-powered company. In fact, their drones may be delivering pizza to your door someday soon. Humans no longer need to engage in face to face communications.

As a result, hiding behind a computer screen has had a significant impact on how we take care of ourselves. Why? We care less what people think of how we look or act when they can't see us. And, if they don't agree, or have any significance to what we need or want (at the time), we swipe over them or delete them. But taking care of ourselves takes effort - there is no app for that.

Social connections are at the mercy of our technology.

Just as I typed that I could hear my mother screaming in my head, "You shouldn't care what anyone thinks." There you have it: The biggest conundrum we are facing as a society right now.

Just when most of us "baby boomers" have finally gotten to the point in our lives that we don't care about what others think, I am starting to think that we should, and that we need to. It provides checks and balances for how we portray ourselves to the world.

These are some questions that will likely be at the forefront of discussions about this subject in the future:

- If we don't care, what happens next?
- Will we end up not caring at all?
- Will our DNA change as a result of our lifestyle choices?
- Has it already?

It seems that fashion and style are the only things that motivate us these days.

"The choice to lose weight is often a result of vanity, not healthy choices. If you ask most women, they will say the best way to a nice body is through the butt," claims Fitness Goals expert Katelyn Michaud. Yes, people, we are that vain. According to fashion gurus like Simon Perez, who underwent a major weight reduction himself, there is even bigger news. Style trends are leaning toward more simplistic, almost binary type fashions. If this happens, there will be no need to worry what you look like at all.

Throw virtual reality technology and autonomous cars in the mix and you can see that the future is shaping up to be a less healthy place. At least there will be more time to spend working on getting in shape.

Thankfully, according to a recent report on CJAD radio, there is a new technology in development that may help people deal with these issues. According to its developers, it will provide instant health results - welcoming news for individuals who do not want to connect with anyone. It is proposed to take intermittent pain-free blood tests, monitor your blood pressure and oxygen levels, and test up to 50 key metrics to determine your current health status.

No, it is not a doctor; it is a new fit wristband that is about to knock Polar M600 off the top. In keeping with the fact that style is a motivating factor, a new stylish wristband can't hurt.

The Magic of Food Journal

We all struggle with nutrition. It's a never-ending battle of willpower, cravings, and convenience that end up dictating our food choices in the kitchen, often to our detriment. It can leave us feeling a little hopeless, like we are forever destined to having to suffer the consequences that come with not eating well.

It doesn't have to be this way, however. There is an easy way that you can take the power back in the kitchen—using a food journal to record your meals.

Simple, yes, but unbelievably powerful.

After all, here are just some of the things that start to happen when you track and monitor your food choices:

1. **You'll eat better.** There is no bigger benefit than this—the awareness that comes with measuring and tracking your own nutrition will encourage you to make better dietary decisions. It shines a light on the things you are missing in your diet—more protein or water, for example—while also showcasing some of the things you'd like to reduce or drop entirely. Most of us live willfully in the dark with our nutrition, preferring to submit to our cravings along the way. Using a food journal will educate you on what you are actually eating—and often enough this is the spark necessary to make significant change.

2. **You will lose weight.** Because we generally don't think about what we eat—we tend to eat according to habit or craving—we aren't accountable to what we are eating. One of the big perks of keeping a food journal is that a lot of the mindless eating that doesn't serve any purpose beside satisfying boredom will be put on the chopping block. A study by Kaiser Permanante in 2008 found that participants lost twice as much weight when they recorded their meals. The awareness and "pause" that comes with reflecting on what you are eating forces you to be more attentive to food choices.

3. **Connects lifestyle to diet.** For the millions of us who eat food items that don't agree with us the connection isn't always clear. Especially when it's a meal or piece of food that we really like. Whether it is a gluten or lactose sensitivity, or trying to keep to a specific diet in relation to a health condition (diabetes, for instance), keeping your food journal will help you stay on top of your nutrition and keep you feeling good. This was one of the big benefits that happened to me when I finally got serious about mastering my nutrition. It wasn't the weight I lost, or the faster recovery after a brutal swim workout, it was the general feeling of wellness and increased energy.

4. **Shows you that you don't always eat because you are hungry** . One of the most surprising realizations you will come to in your first few days of journaling your meals is

that you don't always eat because of hunger. In fact, a lot of the unnecessary eating you are doing comes when you are stressed out, bored, or eating is being triggered by an external cue or the environment (you get to the pub with your friends, for example). Getting under the hood of why you eat can be just as critical to cleaning up your diet as what you are eating.

5. **It will show you how reality and perceptions don't always match up.** Gaining self-awareness in the kitchen is fundamental to crushing your nutrition, no matter what your goals are. Frequently when I help athletes with their nutrition they will tell me how much fruits and veggies they eat, how they are always hydrated, and so on. But when they sit down and keep a food diary for a few days the truth turns out to be a little different. We tend to inflate the good parts of our diet and play down the bad stuff. Getting a more accurate picture and a heightened sense of awareness will help you repair your diet moving forward, and this starts by properly recording your food intake.

In Closing

When it comes to our diet a lot of us feel a little lost, or helpless. With so much information out there we resign ourselves to being prey to our cravings. There are tools out there to help you combat this helplessness, from doing regular meal prepping to sitting down with a registered dietitian to have them throw together a meal plan for you.

But if you want to do something for your diet today, start recording your meals.

Your nutrition doesn't have to be a mystery, or something that you need to feel helpless about. You can take control of your diet, or at least start the process, by sitting down and putting pen to paper after each of your meals.

Pair it with your workout log book and you will start seeing some crazy results in the gym, the mirror, and most importantly, in your overall health and wellness.

Your Hormones Are What You Eat

Did you know that your diet has a discernible impact on your hormone balance and hormonal regulation? Our hormones are responsible for our bone strength, muscle strength, libido and numerous other bodily functions so it's important to support proper hormonal balance; below are some of the best foods that support healthy hormone balance and those that are best avoided.

Why your hormones are what you eat

Many non-organic crops are routinely sprayed with pesticides that contain endocrine inhibitors. These chemicals throw normal hormone regulation off balance and prevent hormones from working properly within the body. Some pesticides contain compounds called xenoestrogens. Once in the body, they exert the same effect as the natural hormone estrogen. This results in estrogen dominance, which has been found to increase a person's risk of numerous diseases including diabetes, breast cancer, and obesity.((CeresOrganics: 10 Foods To Eat (Or Not) For Balanced Hormones))

According to the Environmental Working Group, you can reduce your pesticide exposure by up to 80% by avoiding the most commonly-contaminated crops, even if you do not buy organic produce.((Natural Society: Organic and Conventional Food Differences | The Certified Organic Seal))

The top 10 most frequently-contaminated crops

((Green: Pesticide residues in many foods – organic is the answer))

- Grapes
- Celery
- Bok/pak choi
- Nectarines
- Oranges
- Strawberries
- Spring onions
- Lemons
- Wheat
- Cucumber

Dairy is another food you may wish to eliminate from your diet if you suspect that you suffer from a hormone imbalance. This is because even organic dairy products contain high levels of bovine hormones, which can prove disruptive to the human endocrine system.((One Green Planet: This is How Dairy Affects Your Hormones. Get Ready to #DitchDairy Today!)) Dairy products typically contain dozens of hormones, including estrogen. This can result in estrogen dominance and increased risk of health problems, such as reproductive disorders and cancer.

Foods that support healthy hormones

Feeling worried after knowing so many foods should be avoided? No worries! There're lots of foods that contain substances that boost hormone production and balance. Check now!

- Avocados
- Coconut oil
- Flaxseeds, chia seeds and walnuts
- Raw carrots
- Maca root

Making dietary changes can take time and effort, but the long-term benefits are significant. Our diet has a major impact on how we feel and function, and on our susceptibility to disease. Therefore it is worth experimenting with making a few changes and transitioning to a healthier, hormone-friendly way of eating.

The Shocking Power of Prepping Your Meals

It costs too much. Takes too much time. I don't eat that poorly. Blah blah blah.

Over the years, I've heard these tired excuses over and over again from athletes and non-athletes alike when it comes to getting their nutrition under control. There's this persistent attitude and belief that our food choices are out of our control, and that we must be resigned to them and the subsequent ill effects (bad skin, poor health outcomes, added medical costs, etc.) that happen as a result.

But it doesn't have to be this way.

It's possible to eat much, much better while also saving money and time. Not only all that, but you can finally take control of your nutrition once and for all.

How is this possible?

With the unbelievable power of doing meal prep.

Here are just a few of the things that happen when you start planning and preparing your meals:

You grow confident in your ability to eat well.

The thing you will feel the most won't necessarily be the cost savings, or the weight loss (or gain, depending on your goals in the kitchen). It will be that burst of pride that comes from eating well, consistently.

Meal prep will show you that you can master your nutrition habits.

Planning and prepping gives us a sense of optimism and a feeling of control that is lacking when we subject our nutritional intake according to our cravings and how we are feeling at the moment that hunger strikes.

Being freed from the constant need to be on alert to eat well is exhausting, and is one of the reasons that we falter when it comes to making good food choices.

Meal prep makes things simpler and gives you the confidence in knowing that you have more power and control over your urges and diet than you ever thought possible.

You start eating better.

Planning your meals means that you are *purposely* eating.

Your meals are designed and prepared with a goal in mind, and not just to satiate a ravenous and sometimes ill-tempered hunger. Your meals aren't prepared according to your cravings, or how you feel, or what kind of day you are having, but in consideration of what you want to achieve with your diet.

After all, when planning your meals you are rational and objective, unlike in the moments where we are starving and we are having a crappy day.

What happens next will show itself in a myriad of ways. For athletes who want to clean up their diet, this means faster recovery and better workouts (and is why it's one of my top nutrition tips for athletes). For the rest of us, it means having more energy and maintaining a healthier weight.

Whatever our goals are, when we plan to eat well we are much more likely to succeed.

You save money.

As someone who is guilty of ordering pizza or sushi after a big workout, this was especially noticeable. The savings account grew by a stunning and slightly embarrassing amount of money over the course of my first couple weeks of meal prepping.

Yeah, the first time you go to Costco to buy all the supplies you will need in bulk will be a kick to the wallet, but when you factor in all of the fast food, going out for meals, and last minute trips to the grocery stores the cost savings multiply quickly.

Don't believe me? Start writing out how much you are spending each day in your workout log and contrast it when you are in full-blown meal prep mode. The difference will stun you.

You save time.

In addition to saving some of that sweet, sweet moola, you will also reap a savings in time. Not only in meal preparation, but from going out for food, and repeated trips to the grocery store.

Yes, there is an upfront time investment. The big trip to the grocery store, and then a couple of hours to bang out a week's worth of meals.

But the return comes in fast and heavy from there on out. Consider that if you make yourself 21 meals on a Sunday afternoon, you are cutting the meal prep time from *every single one* of those individual meals. Not only the prep time, but also the standing before the fridge and the texts between you and your partner ("What should we do for dinner?").

As an added bonus, if you pick up everything you need on your list once a week you'll save yourself additional trips to the grocery store over the week. Standing in grocery store line-ups is no one's idea of a good time, so let's chalk this up as a big win.

You are less stressed out.

Eating shouldn't be stressful, and the act itself isn't necessarily—but deciding *what* to eat often is. We are regularly pitted in a battle of what we want to eat (Pizza! Burgers!) versus what we should be eating (Salad! Fish!).

Even though it seems like a trivial thing, these types of decisions deplete our willpower levels over the course of the day. It's why, at the end of the day, when we stumble in after a long day at work and a hard workout that we are so susceptible to making poor food decisions.

Meal prepping removes willpower from the equation altogether, freeing you up to wield it against other the other pressing matters of the day (Should I go to bed early? Should I go workout?).

The Takeaway

As a kid, I swam competitively, and for me this meant two-a-day swim practices bracketing a full day of school. I learned the power of meal prep in those moments out of necessity—if I didn't pack myself a bunch of meals for the day, I wouldn't be eating.

Little did I know that this experience would help encourage better nutrition habits later in life.

This Sunday, try planning and preparing a few meals for your week. You certainly don't need to start out by cooking a week's worth of meals if you've never tried it before, but you should at the very least try cooking for a couple days worth of food.

Your time, your wallet, and your health thank you in advance.

The Problem with Milk

When we think about the benefits of milk we immediately think of bones and teeth. Children are encouraged to drink more to promote healthy bone and teeth growth while women are told to drink more to ward off osteoporosis. But is drinking milk actually as healthy for our bones as we've always thought?

A study found that countries with the highest dairy consumption, which includes most of the Western world, have the highest rates of osteoporosis. So if milk is so good for our bones, then why are more people who consume dairy products suffering from bone fracture incidence? This offers a contradiction that seems to show drinking calcium-rich milk may not be as great for our bone health than we originally thought.

The Problem With Milk #1: Animal Protein

Yes, milk is packed full of calcium but the problem lies with the fact that it's animal protein. When our bodies digest animal protein, it acidifies the sensitive pH level and since our body is continuously keeping an optimal balance, it triggers a biological correction and works to get it back on track.

The problem is that calcium is a great acid neutraliser so our body takes the calcium from the bones in order to keep the pH level balanced. So ironically, we drink milk to get calcium which then causes the calcium contained in our bones being taken out to lessen the acidity: drinking milk is actually depleting our calcium reserves rather than adding to it.

The Problem With Milk #2: Pasteurisation Process

Cow's milk is obviously designed for calves and for us humans to be able to digest it efficiently, it needs to go through a pasteurisation process which involves applying heat to destroy pathogens in food, in order to kill disease-carrying germs and preventing milk from going sour too early.

The problem with pasteurisation is the process also destroys the goodness in milk including the probiotics, vitamin C, iodine and enzymes needed to allow the body to absorb calcium. As a result, the milk we drink whether it's whole, 1%, 2% or skimmed, all go through this process and ends up in our stores.

The Research

Many scientific studies back up the claims that drinking milk is actually detrimental to our bone health. They are, in fact, starting to outweigh the number of studies that say milk helps to reduce bone fractures and conditions like osteoporosis.

The 12 year-long Harvard Nurses' Health Study based on nearly 78,000 women showed those between the ages of 34 and 59 who consumed calcium through milk and other dairy products broke more bones than those who rarely drank milk.

The authors of the study comment that ""These data do not support the hypothesis that higher consumption of milk or other food sources of calcium by adult women protects against hip or forearm fractures."

Another long-term study from Sweden involved following 61,433 women and 45,339 men between 11 and 20 years for bone health and dietary habits. They also found there was no link between increased milk consumption and lower risk of bone fracture – instead it was the opposite. They did hint that low-lactose fermented milk products such as yoghurt and cheese didn't have such a detrimental effect on bone health as drinking milk.

Calcium-Rich Alternative Foods

The best route to take for your bone health is to not only eat calcium-rich foods but also alkaline-rich foods to make sure the acidity levels in your body don't interfere with the calcium already present in the bones.

Calcium-rich foods include:

- Broccoli (86 milligrams in 2 cups raw)
- Dark green, leafy vegetables such as kale (101 milligrams in 1 cup raw, chopped)
- Almonds (75 milligrams per ounce (about 23 whole almonds)
- Bok Choy (74 milligrams per 1 cup shredded)
- Figs (121 milligrams per 1/2 cup dried)
- Sardines (351 milligrams in one 3.75-ounce can)
- Tofu (434 milligrams per half cup)

Many cereals and other food products are fortified with calcium which can be a great addition to your diet.

Alkaline-rich foods include: garlic, spinach, broccoli, carrots, lettuce, green beans, beetroot, courgette (zucchini), grapes, apples, kiwi fruit, berries, blackcurrants, figs and dates.

Adding Variety To Your Diet

Are you scared you might have some blood pressure concerns? Here's good news! Science has come up with a special diet that is designed to help prevent or even treat high blood pressure. Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) is an effective way to maintain healthy blood pressure. Why is it recommended? It's backed by science and simple. Just veer away from too much sodium and consume a variety of potassium, calcium, and magnesium-rich foods that lower blood pressure.

Why should you care about blood pressure level when if you're young?

Your circulatory system and overall health will benefit from maintaining a healthy blood pressure. It's important to understand that as you grow older, your blood pressure will naturally rise. This causes your heart to work harder pumping nutrient and oxygen-rich blood to your whole body. Blood flows through arteries as it goes to different parts of the body. As you age, your arteries become less elastic. When they're stiff, heart muscles become thicker and grow weaker; pumping blood will be too hard for them. This may damage arteries and cause not enough blood to get to your organs. When this happens, organs will malfunction, then they'll be damaged. A damaged brain may cause a stroke, a damaged heart may cause a heart attack, and damaged kidneys may lead to kidney failure.

By following a DASH diet, you can help maintain a healthy blood pressure. Here are eight ways to follow the DASH diet easily.

1. Vegetables (4 to 5 servings per day)

Veggies are full of vitamins, fiber, and minerals such as potassium and magnesium. It's highly recommended to consume broccoli, carrots, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, greens and other veggies daily to maximize DASH.

One serving may include: a.1 cup raw leafy green vegetables b. 1/2 cup cut-up raw or cooked vegetables.

Chow tips:

- a. Treat veggies as main dishes and not just side dishes. A big serving of mix vegetables served with brown rice or whole-wheat noodles can serve as the main dish

for a meal.

- b. Fresh or frozen vegetables — it doesn't matter. Both are good choices.
- c. Be wise; buy frozen and canned vegetables that are labeled as low sodium or no salt added. You can be creative. Here's a tip on how you can add up more servings to your daily serving. For example, in a stir-fry, you can minimize the amount of meat (put in just a third and increase the amount of vegetables by 50%.

2. Fruits (4 to 5 servings per day)

A lot of fruits need a little time to prepare to be a part of a healthy meal. They're full of fiber, potassium, and magnesium, and contain low fat — except for coconuts.

One serving can include one medium fruit, 1/2 cup fresh, frozen or canned fruit, or 4 ounces of juice.

Chow tips:

- a. Spice up your meals with a piece of fruit. You can take another as a snack. Fill up your day with fresh fruits as dessert. Add up a dollop of low-fat yogurt to complete your dessert.
- b. Make it a point whenever appropriate to leave on edible peels. The peels of pears, apples and many fruits with pits add up texture to recipes and most contain healthy fiber and nutrients.
- c. Some medications may interact with grape juice and other juices, and many citrus fruits, so it's wise to consult your doctor about this.

[todotask id="52" description="Have at least 4 servings of fruits today"]

3. Grains (6 to 8 servings per day)

Cereal, bread, pasta, and rice — all of these are grains. One serving may include 1/2 cup cooked cereal, rice, or pasta, 1 slice whole-wheat bread, or 1 ounce dry cereal.

Chow tips:

- a. Focus on whole grains; they have more fiber and nutrients compared to refined grains. For example, choose brown rice over white rice, whole-wheat pasta over regular pasta, and whole-grain bread over white bread. Choose products labeled "100 percent whole grain" or "100 percent whole wheat."
- b. Naturally, grains are low in fat content. Keep them that way by not adding butter, cream or cheese sauces.

4. Fish, Poultry, and Lean Meat (6 servings or fewer per day)

Meat is a rich source of B vitamins, iron, zinc, and protein. Pick a variety of lean meat and target no more than 6 ounces per day. Minimizing your meat intake will make room for more veggies.

- *Chow Tips:*
- a.Take away fat and skin from poultry and meat and instead of frying, bake, broil, grill, or roast. This will minimize fat from your diet.
- b. Also, eat meals with heart-healthy fish like herring, salmon, or tuna. These are fish that are high in omega-3 fatty acids. They can lower your total cholesterol levels.

5. Dairy (2 to 3 servings per day)

Cheese, milk, yogurt, and other dairy products are good sources of calcium, vitamin D, and protein. However, the key is to make sure you pick products that are low fat or fat-free, for the simple reason that they can fill you up with mostly saturated fat. One serving may include 1 percent milk or 1 cup skim, 1 cup yogurt (low fat), or 1 & 1/2 ounces cheese (part-skim).

Chow Tips:

- a. Low-fat/fat-free frozen yogurt may help you boost the amount of dairy products you take in and you can enjoy a sweet treat after meals. You may add a piece of fruit for variety.
- b. If, like me, you have a problem digesting dairy products, pick lactose-free products or you can try taking an over-the-counter product that contains lactase which can reduce or help prevent lactose intolerance.
- c. Go easy on regular and even fat-free cheeses. They typically contain high levels of sodium.

6. Fats and oils (2 to 3 servings per day)

Fat assists the body to absorb essential vitamins and helps the immune system. However, too much fat heightens the risk of heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. The DASH diet aims for a balance by limiting body fat content to a total of less than 30% of daily calories from fat, focusing on healthier fats that are monounsaturated.

One serving may include 1 teaspoon soft margarine, 1 tablespoon mayonnaise or 2 tablespoons salad dressing.

Chow Tips:

- a. Avoid saturated fat and trans fat. They're the main dietary culprits in increasing your body's risk of having coronary artery disease. DASH assists in keeping your daily saturated fat to less than 6% of your total calories by limiting portions of meat, butter, cheese, whole milk, cream, and eggs in your diet. It also limits foods made from lard, solid shortenings, palm, and coconut oils.
- b. Stay away from trans fat, commonly found in such processed foods like crackers, baked goods. and fried items.
- c. make sure to read food labels of margarine and salad dressing. This way, you can pick those that have the lowest levels of saturated fat and those that are free of trans fat.

7. Nuts, seeds and legumes (4 to 5 servings a week)

Almonds, kidney beans, sunflower seeds, lentils, peas, and other foods in this family are great sources of magnesium, protein, and potassium. They're also packed with fiber and phytochemicals: plant compounds that may protect against some cancers and cardiovascular disease.

Suggested serving portions are small and are to be consumed only a few times every week due to the fact that these foods have high calories. One serving may include 2 tablespoons seeds, 1/3 cup nuts, or 1/2 cup cooked beans or peas.

Chow Tips:

- a. Nuts at times solicit negative talk because of their fat content. However, they contain fats that are healthy; these are monounsaturated fat and omega-3 fatty acids. They may be high in calories, so you must take them in moderation. You can throw them into stir-fries, salads, or cereals.
- b. Soybean-based products, like tofu and tempeh may be a good meat substitute because they contain amino acids that your body needs to make a complete protein, just like meat.

8. Sweets (5 servings or fewer every week)

You don't have to delete sweets entirely from your world while following the DASH diet, just take them in moderation. One serving may include 1 tablespoon jelly, jam, or sugar, 1/2 cup sorbet, or 1 cup lemonade.

Chow Tips:

- a. When eating sweets, choose the ones that are fat-free or low-fat, like sorbets, fruit ices, jelly beans, hard candy, graham crackers, or low-fat cookies.
- b.Use artificial sweeteners such as aspartame (NutraSweet, Equal) and sucralose (Splenda) sensibly even if they can help spare sugar. It's fine to swap a diet cola for a regular cola, but remember it's still better to down nutritious beverage like low-fat milk or better yet, plain water.
- c. Reduce your intake of added sugar. They don't have nutritional value and contain more calories.

Sleep On Your Left Side for Better Digestion
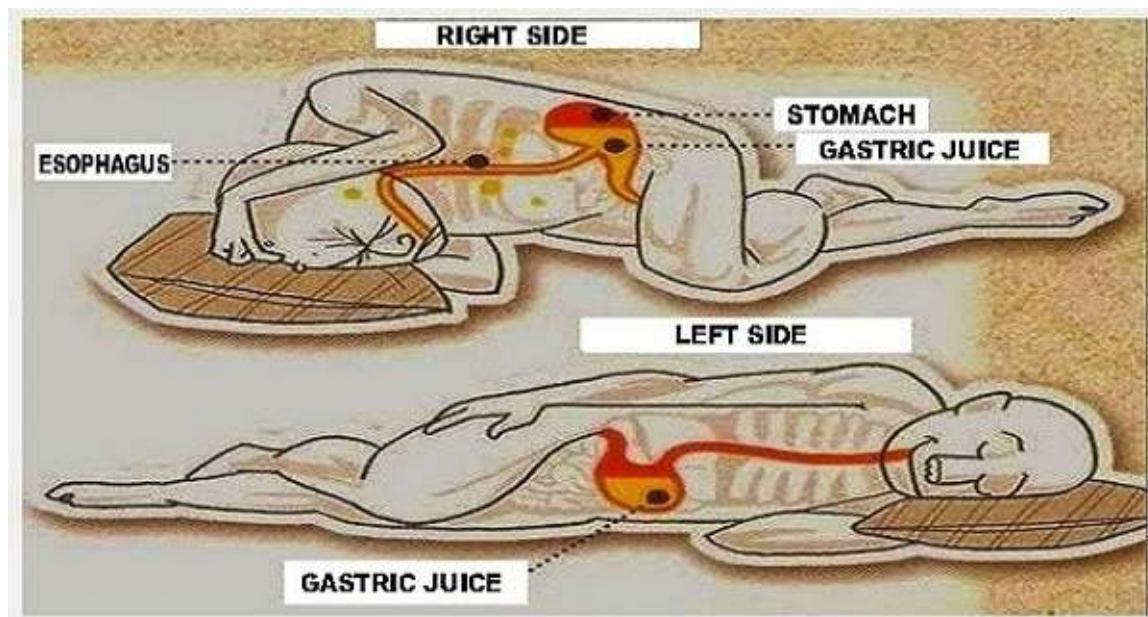
Heartburn and gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) can be difficult and painful to live with -- and not just during the day or after meals. One study showed that 1 in 4 adults with GERD suffer from this at night. The pain and discomfort this condition causes can interrupt sleep -- and up to 55% of GERD patients suffer from sleep disturbances related to GERD or heartburn pain. This can have a serious and negative impact on quality of life.

The good news is that, apart from medications, there are simple lifestyle changes that can have a big impact on this condition.

Sleeping On The Left Side

It might come as a surprise, but sleeping on the left side is one simple way to cut down on the problem of nighttime GERD pain. No one is exactly sure why, but there are many theories:

- One theory is because the stomach is situated on the left side of the body and when you sleep at this time, gravity itself makes it less likely that the contents of the stomach will back up into the esophagus, causing painful reflux.
- Other studies have shown that sleeping on the left side can increase the pressure on the sphincter (opening) between the stomach and esophagus and make reflux less likely.
- Another clinical review of natural remedies for GERD found that many studies have shown that lying on the right side can *increase* the length of the GERD attack as well as the amount of acid that refluxes into the esophagus, whereas lying on the left side can *reduce* these problems. Left-lying positions are thought to prevent relaxation of the sphincter and keep the sphincter *above* the level of gastric acid.

Other Tips For Natural GERD Control

It is important to remember, however, that just sleeping on the left side is not enough to help manage this disease -- there are other ways to control it naturally, including:

- Eating healthy and avoiding junk foods.
- Elevating the head of the bed at least 30 degrees to reduce the chance of reflux.
- Waiting at least an hour between finishing a meal and going to bed.
- Avoiding foods and beverages that can irritate the stomach, such as chocolate, alcohol, and spicy or fatty foods.

If GERD or reflux is a problem, it is important to talk to your doctor about this, as ongoing issues with it can permanently damage the esophagus. Sometimes, even with natural control tips like the ones mentioned above, prescription or over-the-counter medications are needed as well.

The 4Rs that Save Your Digestion

Our digestive systems are very complex and sensitive. This is why, at some points in our life, we can develop short or long term digestive problems. The lifestyle choices we choose and the types of food we consume can contribute greatly to the health of our digestive systems preventing or contributing to problems such as intolerance, increased acid or alkaline levels, acid reflux or gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

Being mindful of the foods we eat and our consumption habits can help improve the health of our digestive system and there's an approach we can all follow that can help to improve the digestion process and that's called the ***"4Rs".***

1. Remove

The first step is to remove any foods that are known to contribute to bad digestive health. These are usually trigger foods and beverages that cause negative reactions in the gut such as alcohol, caffeine, processed foods, and sugar-loaded items. Other triggers could be diary or gluten which can be temporarily removed to see if they are having any effect.

2. Repair

The second step is to start a healing process whereby you consume a clean diet full of unprocessed foods to rid the body of toxins that are harmful to the gut and promote healing in any damaged areas of the digestive system. Consuming extra vitamins and minerals that help towards good gut health such as omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins A, C, and E, zinc, turmeric and aloe vera. Replacing toxic ingredients with healthy alternatives with added boosts will give the body time to heal and repair itself.

3. Restore

The bacteria in our gut is very sensitive and the amount of 'good bacteria' is essential for a healthy digestive system. Restoring this optimal bacteria flora is the next step in the 4Rs process. Introducing probiotics such as Lactobacillus acidophilus and Bifidobacterium lactis found in certain yoghurts, in fermented foods such as kefir, kimchi, and sauerkraut, and also in tablet form, will help to reinforce the good bacteria levels and promote a maintained gut health.

4. Replace

The last step is to make sure bile salts, digestive enzymes, and hydrochloric acid levels (stomach acid) are at their optimal peak for a fully functional and healthy digestive process. Taking supplements containing digestive enzymes and replacing processed salt with organic sea salt is key to stimulating the growth of the digestive enzymes living in the gut. This is crucial because digestive enzymes and hydrochloric acid work hand in hand to break down food and create a healthy digestive process.

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Acknowledgement